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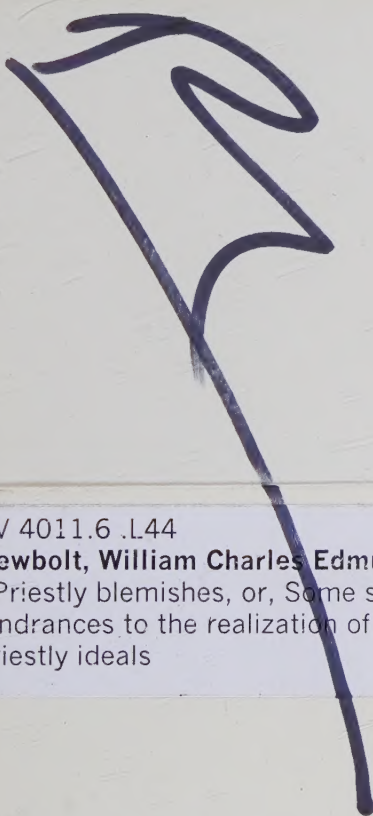
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Priestly blemishes, or, Some secret
hindrances to the realization of
priestly ideals

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PRIESTLY BLEMISHES

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PRIESTLY BLEMISHES

OR

SOME SECRET HINDRANCES
TO THE REALIZATION OF PRIESTLY IDEALS

A SEQUEL

BEING A

SECOND COURSE OF PRACTICAL LECTURES

DELIVERED IN S. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL TO "OUR
SOCIETY" AND OTHER CLERGY, IN
LENT, 1902

BY THE REV.

W. C. E. NEWBOLT, M.A.

CANON AND CHANCELLOR OF S. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

"Mundamini qui fertis vasa Domini"

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

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TO THE
DEVOTED CLERGY
OF
THE DIOCESE OF LONDON
WHOSE BLEMISHES
ARE THE DUST OF LABOUR
AND THEIR SCARS
THE WOUNDS OF CONFLICT

“Religio munda et immaculata apud Deum et Patrem hæc est: Visitare pupillos et viduas in tribulatione eorum, et immaculatum se custodire ab hoc sæculo.”

P R E F A C E

THESE Lectures are published as being in some sort a continuation and completion of those delivered to the same Society of clergy in 1898.

They deal with very simple subjects, and with difficulties in the clerical life which can only be met by perseverance in the application of well-known remedies. But any one who is at all conversant with the spiritual combat and the hard struggle of life, will know that it is round these simple things, as they seem, that the battle most often rages, and that through them the way to excellence is to be found.

It is a day when many hard and unjust things are being said about the clergy; but surely it is in itself an indication of no ordinary earnestness

in the spiritual life, that so large a number of hard-worked, active men should be found ready to gather together, week by week, in the busiest season of the year, to think over subjects such as these, treated in the barest and most elementary form; as those who have determined at least to see to it that, while teaching others, they do not neglect themselves; while they are ready to listen with patience to one who speaks of faults with which he is well acquainted, to those who know the remedies better than he knows them himself.

These Lectures are once more, therefore, committed to the kindness and forbearance of his brother clergy, not by their teacher, but by their fellow-labourer in the hard struggle after an ideal which so persistently seems to elude our grasp.

W. C. E. N.

3, AMEN COURT,
Whitsuntide, 1902.

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LECTURE I.

VANITY.

“Men’s minds have no hiding-places out of themselves. Their affectations do but betray another part of their nature.”

I VENTURED to ask you, when I last spoke to your Society, to consider certain ideals of life and work which the Priest ought to put before himself—in his devotion, in his ministry, in his dealing with penitents, in his parish, and in his own life and conversation.

I.

Time rolls on, and, if I mistake not, one of our sorest trials is this—that our ideals seem to elude us. “I cannot attain unto it,” we say in despair. “Why is it,” we ask, “that in matters so simple of

attainment, in results which I have determined to realize, I have failed again and again to do the things that I would? Over my prayers seem to be written the awful words, 'The provocation of their offering.'¹ Over my ministrations hovers the warning of Nadab and Abihu. My pastoral life is threatened with the indignity of the hireling shepherd." We forget the extreme difficulty of simple things; we forget that it is the turn and the curve, the stroke and the dot, which give the likeness and touch of fire, such as is only possible to the brush dipped in living colour and held in the hand of genius.

A modern artist has written under the four pictures which form his conception of the myth of Pygmalion these legends: "The heart desires;" "The hand refrains;" "The godhead fires;" "The soul attains."²

There is the heart's desire,—the ideal which nothing around him can satisfy; there is the

¹ Ezek. xx. 28.

² See "Religion in Recent Art." Lectures by P. T. Forsyth, p. 70, etc.

pause to think, in which the hand refrains from working; he muses until the fire kindles; and at last his soul attains.

My brethren, here and now, in this busy Lent, you are refraining your hand for the moment from work, that you may ponder and pray till the vision of your heart's desire passes, almost by a magic touch, into the realization of a great achievement, and your ideals live before you. For to step aside to gaze and think over our work will almost certainly reveal the causes of our failure; not, it may be, in some simple thing which we can easily alter, as the artist can substitute one colour for another, but in faults of temper, faults of method, faults of handling, faults which we know and do not recognize, faults which we recognize and do not alter, faults which we alter and then once more resume, which give our ghostly enemy such power over us, when he points to our failures as a sign of the hopelessness of our task and of the visionary nature of our aspirations. It is particularly baffling to fail without knowing why we fail. To know where we have gone wrong, even if it means a long

and laborious process of recovery, is far preferable to the state where everything has been done and the result only remains a failure.

I am asking you, therefore, to consider some well-known causes of moral failure, and to see whether in them we cannot trace some of the reasons why our ideals still remain unrealized, and why we fail to act with power on the mass of indifference and sin which seems to blunt the keenest edge of our most carefully prepared instruments.

II.

To-day I will ask you to consider a particularly subtle and dangerous vice, which we all despise in others, and so often fail to detect in ourselves, known as vanity.

Vanity, with its connotation of emptiness, seems to be one of those satellites which revolve around other better-known vices or virtues, and which we must needs distinguish from them. So joy speeds on its brilliant path round happiness, glory round

beauty ; and here vanity draws some of its lurid light from pride, from which, however, if there are points of affinity between them, it must be carefully distinguished. Pride, as we know it, as one of the seven deadly sins, seems to be a vice which affects the whole attitude of the man, and gives his life a wrong orientation. Pride is akin to the attitude which would substitute the worship of Baal for the worship of Jehovah. It is the rebellion of the individual against the counsels of God, ending when it is developed in the drawing towards self of that which belongs to the Almighty ; and is a siding with evil in that dreadful war which is ever going forward, where Michael and his angels raise their victorious chant, "Who is like God ?" against the devil and his angels, who would fain thrust the Eternal from His throne. Pride, viewed in our relations to our fellow-men, is that spirit which recognizes no interests except those which have a reflex bearing on self ; which is ever seeking to throw the life's work of another into our own extended domain, until, through envy and avarice, it draws to itself anything and

everything which stand in the way of self-glorification.

Vanity is not a master vice, like pride, but it draws a great deal of its malice from its connection with it. Vanity is rather the vice of one who, although he has not taken up a rebellious attitude against God, or consciously set up the standard of self, has yet allowed the sense of his own individuality to become prominent, and to assert itself. The vain man is like the too obtrusive voice in a choir, or the colour in a picture which is out of harmony with its scheme. It is a vice of procedure rather than a vice of attitude like pride. But for all that, vanity does an infinity of harm, first to the inner life of him who falls a victim to it, and then to the work which he attempts to do with powers impaired by its disabling touch.

And let us pause to notice how very much personality has to do with the success or failure of our work. It is quite true, we eagerly cling to the belief that the unworthiness, even the sinfulness, of the Minister does not invalidate the

Sacramental acts of ministry.¹ It is quite true that ministrations which are based too much on personal influence are neither sound nor permanent; yet it would be idle to deny that a very great deal depends in every parish on the man whose character makes itself felt for good or evil behind his ministry. The man's life hangs round him like the folds of his chasuble at the Altar, and invests his words and actions with the appeal of reverence or the chilling effect of unreality. A man's life follows him into the pulpit, and his sermon is a palimpsest on another writing only imperfectly obliterated, to the eyes of those who have become acquainted with it during the week. Cleverness is emptied of its brilliancy by unworthiness; simplicity, and even ignorance, are elevated into a position of power by innate goodness and earnestness of character at their back. It is a troublesome and anxious element this personality, and vanity is a vice which has seized upon it, which emphasizes the man—his appearance, his gait, his voice, his endowments, his

¹ See Article XXVI.

history, his family, his achievements, sometimes his very faults, until the border-line between vanity and pride is crossed, and even while the people shout, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man!" the spiritual life fades and expires, and the work which all centred round self sinks down with a flare into the socket, and leaves nothing to take its place.

And yet vanity is a vice to which the Priest, as such, is peculiarly exposed. At an early age he is raised on a pinnacle, he is called by a title of respect, he is set up publicly to teach those who have no opportunity of correcting him. He sees grey-haired men and men of affairs, as well as those who eagerly look to him for aid, listening to him; and it is only too possible that he may think of himself more highly than he ought to think. He is set to lead the devotions of saints, he is welcomed in almost all homes and is thrust into many positions of prominence. It requires, indeed, a large measure of God's grace to escape the deadly influence of vain-glory which may steal upon a man before he is aware of it.

III.

There are many ways in which clerical vanity shows itself.

1. The most obvious, perhaps, is in the love of display.

(1) Which of us would not resent with all the force of our being the imputation that we sang the Divine Office, or even celebrated the Holy Mysteries, with a view to display? And yet what more common imputation than this is brought against the clergy, by those who wish to ridicule them or to disparage their office? "*Fas est et ab hoste doceri.*" Do let us remember that we are kept by good taste from many gross forms of vanity, even when we are not restrained by higher motives. A deliberate showing ourselves off, a display of our voice, or articulation, or dramatic powers, would be repugnant to us. But the question goes deeper than this. Do the congregation feel that we are thinking of them first? Are we addressing them or God? Are we their mouth-

piece in the offering of a great petition to the Almighty? or are we merely declaiming to them poetical rhapsodies and musical cadences? The man who is addressing God, if he has found Him, forgets self; the man who is addressing the congregation is haunted with the sense of their approval or disapproval of a performance. What a difference there is in these two conceptions of ministerial work in church! It would be something if the life and conversation of the Priest bore witness to the supernatural as being the attitude of one who sees God. It would be much if the outward fringe of worshippers or gazers in church were sobered and impressed by the devotion of those who had evidently caught sight of something which was as yet hardly realized by the unthinking throng. How stirring is the sight of an eager and expectant crowd in some royal Progress! All eyes are strained in one direction, all faces look one way; now the monarch approaches, and first one group and then another has caught the contagion of enthusiasm and the cheering throng becomes radiant with reflected royalty.

So it might be in the worship of God. We Priests claim to be nearest, to be the attendants of His Person. The people, therefore, ought to see that we at all events have caught sight of God, in the reverence, self-abasement, and respect in which our worship passes up before the Majesty of a Presence.

We shall find that we need to hunt down vanity into some obscure corner, lest it should mar the offering of our devotions to God, and lest men through us should "abhor the offering of the Lord." There is, for instance, the vanity which is afraid of being thought to be vain,—the pride of a man who fears to incur the vulgarity of self-display. Just as in some literary or scientific circles, there are men who withhold their opinions, or refrain to put the results of long and patient study upon paper, lest they should be criticized, so there are those who refuse to do their best, who take no pains, who refuse to open their treasures when they worship the King, in a cold reserve, a studied official manner, and unimpassioned routine, which seem to say, "No one shall accuse me of display

or vain-glory in the service of the Church." It is akin to that form of pride which dogs a man's best actions, and makes him fear whether he is always acting from the highest motives, until it reaches to the *reductio ad absurdum* in the man who thinks good works to be a most dangerous form of sin.

I suppose our safety in this, as in everything else, is to be natural, to be ourselves. If God has given us gifts, to rejoice in offering them to Him in the service of the sanctuary. If our endowment is slender, not to compare ourselves with others, but to worship Him Who, after all, looks at the heart; and to banish all those minute tortures as to motives and aims which spring from an over-developed self-love, and to imitate St. Bernard, who, when he was accused of self-conceit by the tempter, during a sermon which he was preaching, said, "Vanity did not bring me here, and vanity shall not drive me hence."¹ Our talents, whether they be five, two, or one, belong to the Lord; and, after all, it is the man

¹ See "François de Fénelon," by Viscount S. Cyres, p. 221.

of one talent who is held up to our rebuke because he withheld from the Lord that which he thought too contemptible to use. Whatever be the reason, it never can be right to offer to the Lord a maimed offering. There is too much of this at the present day. There is, for instance, the gabbling or the mumbling of the service—It does not turn the service into Latin, to make it unintelligible, nor is it a laudable custom of the whole Catholic Church, to say the office in a way which ostentatiously has said adieu to all intelligence, and has flouted the very suggestion of reverence.

Affectation is a form of vanity which has peculiarly disastrous effects on a nation which carries its dislike of ritual even into the amenities of social life. What does it all mean? They say with the Latin poet—

“Es non quod simulas, dissimulasque quod es.”

It is a bad spirit, which may well vitiate a man's actions throughout if he is not careful. It will make him sometimes conceal the fact that he is a Priest at all, or make him ashamed of his wife if he is married, or ashamed of being an

Anglican, or ashamed of the service which he has to offer.

There are few things more exasperating to the average man, than to witness the attempt to turn one rite into another to the destruction of both, in the exigencies of a passing fashion, which forgets that in Liturgical customs, as in architecture, it is better to keep what is good of its kind, and bring out of it the most of which it is capable, than to cut it and carve it about, and deck it with "purple patches" which belong to a different form of excellency altogether, which remain patches to the end, and rob that on to which they are patched of the beauty and dignity which belong to consecutive art.

Never since the days of Churchwarden Gothic in our churches, have we been confronted with such an iconoclast as the man who remodels a national rite, by what is his idea of a laudable practice of the whole Catholic Church. I do plead for reality and the banishing of all affectation in the service of the sanctuary, where, if anywhere, it is thoroughly out of place.

For how quickly this love of display enters into our ministrations! We get to think at last that we, and we only, can do this or that acceptably—I will not say to Almighty God, but to the people. We may get to such a pitch of self-love, that we think it loss of time, or loss of dignity, to be present even, at Divine service, unless we take a prominent or conspicuous part in it ourselves. Sometimes it becomes almost ludicrous to see the way in which an Office is parcelled out—a prayer here, a Lesson there, receiving the alms even, or giving the Blessing; as if it were an indignity unheard of that an ecclesiastic should come to church simply to say his prayers. I have said before, and I say again, that we have a great work before us, not to teach our people only, but to teach ourselves, that simply to come to church to pray, even if we do not strive nor cry nor make our voice to be heard, is a real work, a hard work, which we have to do; and we should do well, surely, to put ourselves as little forward as possible; but if we are put forward, to do our duty, whether it is in saying the public Office,

or in reading even a Lesson, with the sense that we are doing it to God, and not to man.

(2) I have left a yet more obvious field of display still to be discussed, namely, the sermon. And I am not indisposed to think that, except in some cases, the temptation to display is not here so prominent and pressing as in the ministrations which we have just been discussing. The tendency at the present day seems to be to take so little pains, either in the preparation or delivery of sermons, that it is becoming a most serious cause of failing interest in the Church, and is largely responsible for diminished congregations. The vanity of preaching means too often, in the literal meaning of the word, its emptiness. The *Times*, in reviewing the first of a series of new Hand-books for the clergy, says, "Spirituality, probably, is increasing among the clergy; but intellectual interest and knowledge, up to the level of the educated laity, are we fear diminishing." Certainly it is the height of vanity if we conceive that we are going to win people to God simply by our appearance in the pulpit, decently

habited, with a considerable sense that "we are they that ought to speak, who is lord over us?" when all the time we have done little or nothing to prepare our message, or to realize the wants of the people, and while we make little effort to persuade, or to practise such art as we know to be necessary in gaining and keeping their attention.

What actor, what barrister, or what lecturer, whose daily bread depended on the acceptableness of his message, would ever enter on his task thus slenderly equipped?

The dangers of the popular preacher are obvious. At a time when preaching as a whole is so unpopular, it seems hardly necessary to describe them. We shall have to consider presently some of the underlying evils which belong to love of popularity, which only make themselves, perhaps, more patent when they come out in the pulpit. Our dangers, perhaps, are more subtle and less obvious. They are these.

(a) There is the vanity of words.¹ It is by no

¹ See Sermon by the Bishop of Stepney, "Oxford University Sermons" (Bebb), p. 185.

means hard to obtain a fluency of words, and a command of a certain vocabulary, which leads, perhaps, the more empty-headed of our congregation to dub us with the epithet of "eloquent," and to write us down as "orator." Words without wisdom are but leaves without fruit; they do no good, they attract, without satisfying hunger, and provoke the curse of perpetual barrenness in those who can thus dishonestly rest satisfied in words which represent neither thought nor study.

(b) There is the vanity, again, which belongs to the insane determination to follow fashion. A *φύμη*, one of those unexplained extraordinary impressions, goes abroad, that only extempore preaching is to be tolerated in the Catholic Church. And men who have no natural gifts and no special aptitude for this style of oratory torture themselves into adopting one part of extempore preaching, which consists in having no manuscript to depend upon, while they neglect the other and more serious side of intense preparation and careful thinking out, and even

writing out, in some cases, beforehand. Most certainly he who has no message to deliver will fail to reach the heart of his hearers, whether he preach with a book or without one. After all said and done, few sermons have had such wide-reaching influence or commanded such wrapt attention when they were delivered, as "The Parochial and Plain Sermons" of Dr. Newman, preached not only from manuscript, but read without attempt at oratorical display of any sort or description.

It is, in many cases, a laudable desire to win the hearts of his hearers, which induces a man to practise an art which he either imperfectly understands or which he is incapable of mastering; but there is also the foolish vanity which lures a man on to follow a fashion in spite of his better judgment, and to the detriment of his real powers. Neither does the mischief stop here. There is the vanity of saying something startling,—“the new thing,” as has been said, “which is not exactly true, rather than the true thing which happens not to be new.” There is the enunciation of the

strange doctrine which will be talked about, or the subversion of old ideas, which will arrest attention.

Dr. Liddon, in his great sermon on "The Conflict of Faith with Undue Exaltation of Intellect,"¹ has told us of the mercenary intellect, which writes or talks at the rate of so much *per annum*; of the self-advertising intellect which is bent on achieving a reputation, no matter how; of the sensualized intellect, which hardly appears, we may hope, in the pulpit; of the self-reliant or cynical intellect, which is the slave of a sublime egotism. In all these ways vanity may enter the pulpit and colour its utterances, with the disastrous effect which always happens, where the sacred ministry is darkened by the shadow of self; and the sermon, instead of being a message from on high, has to fight its way among the magazine or newspaper articles of the day, where the Priest who has forsaken his own special province and privilege finds himself unequally matched with those who decline to be lectured authoritatively

¹ Liddon, "University Sermons," First Series, Sermon VI.

by one who understands the subject less than themselves.

Before leaving this branch of the subject, it is well to glance here too at the little-mindedness which refuses to attempt great things—at the intellectual or spiritual sloth which expends the least possible effort on the ministry of preaching. For this too is, as we have seen, a form of vanity in which a man, because he cannot do well, refuses to do at all; because he is not conscious of the possession of five talents, proceeds to bury his one; and, because he believes himself to be no preacher, thinks himself relieved of the obligation of delivering a message in any other way than that which will chill and repel. It is a subtle form of vanity only to take trouble about those things in which we excel. But that heart must indeed be a cold one, that soul must be dull and lifeless, which, in the face of all the evils and sorrows whose cry mounts up to Heaven, has no message to deliver, no warning, no consolation, no help; which knows nothing of the eloquence born of sympathy, and the

strength which comes from conviction, or of the grace of the Holy Spirit which enables the most faltering lips to preach the gospel to every heart in the tongue in which he was born.

2. We shall find a second way in which clerical vanity displays itself—in love of popularity which, gradually and subtly, is allowed to eat out the life of principle.

Questions of the day have an awkward way of suddenly cropping up in practical guise in the very heart of our work. An influential parishioner is seized with the unholy desire of marrying a divorced woman. Here is S. John Baptist, who for a long time has had considerable influence with the man; he does many things—he subscribes largely to the charities, he comes to church and hears him gladly. What is he to do? Is he to stick to his monotonous sermon, “It is not lawful for thee”? Is he to lose him, his name and his influence, and make a scandal in the parish, for that which, after all—shame be it said!—is condoned and allowed by many Chancellors, acting ostensibly in a name higher than their own?

Here is a scandal in the very heart of the choir, or of the ringers, or of the guild. Is Phineas the son of Eleazar to deal out discipline and eradicate the mischief, while apparently he shatters the very machinery of the parish? or is he to condone it? Here is a back-wash from the muddy waves of controversy sweeping up against the doctrine preached or the ritual practised. Shall he give in, or lose a large number of influential people from his flock? Or there is pressure from the outside to do something which he knows to be unwise, or to make changes which he knows to be undesirable. What is he to do? Has he the courage to do that most difficult of all things—to resist a friend, and to stand fast in his own integrity and keep his own way? or is he to make an easy compliance for the sake of a temporary applause?

At any moment a man of principle may be called upon to risk a great deal, and hence there is the temptation to sink individuality altogether, and to vote and act to order. Or else there is the temptation to take up a lower line, where the waves

which threaten popularity are less ominous, where the standard set is not too high, where there is no prying into other men's lives, no bigotry of opinion, no attempt to go behind the collected good sense of the nation as expressed in Acts of Parliament, no attempt to question even the decrees of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, or the benevolent provisions of the Public Worship Regulation Act. This attitude takes a subtle form in the man who professes to belong to no party. It sounds well : party spirit is odious, party may easily be put before principle. And yet, in times of earnest struggle, when great principles are at stake, the man of no party may easily find that he is hoping to stand outside a conflict where, on whichever side he stands, there are rude blows and sharp encounters. It is hard to be forced into a conflict where all the cherished work of a lifetime may be at stake. But the man of no party occupies a very difficult, and sometimes an impossible, position. Bishop Stubbs has said, " I will not tell you not to be party men—in the present temper of the world any man who has any interest in his work must

be a party man—but I will warn you against party spirit, and would have you very careful about engaging in party organizations.” He goes on to say, “It is of no use for you to minimise your differences with those who will not minimise their differences with you. It is absurd and wrong in you to act as if the differences between you and a dissenter were unimportant, when to his mind the difference is so important as to warrant him in rejecting that which is of the first moment and value to you, and which you cannot undervalue without doing dishonour to your own faith and to the Church, and to the Head of the Church as He has given you grace to see Him.”¹ Or listen to him once more when he says, “I would not condemn, *a priori*, any of those good men whose claim for respect in these days is based, speaking popularly, on their standing aloof from their party; but they cannot be set outside judgments because they take on themselves to be judges; and it is not likely that the arrogation of supreme discretion . . . will ever enable them to attempt to bring home to

¹ “Ordination Addresses,” Bishop Stubbs, pp. 61, 62.

men's consciences, in the sight of God, the manifestations of a truth about which the coolness of their judgment works rather in condemning others than in justifying their own handling of the word of God." ¹ Here is an attitude which human vanity can only too easily assume; if, when taunted with holding aloof where men are falling here and there as martyrs to principle, they can say that their aloofness is not due to cowardice, but to a lofty superiority which sees in the matter of contention nothing worth the contending.

3. Bear with me when I briefly try to point out to you that clerical vanity may display itself in yet another way, and that is in the way of an emphasized and exaggerated individuality. We all know something of the parochial narrowness which is the foe to a public patriotism, which has a soul which never rises above church expenses, and which sets the condition of the parish organ far above the prosperity of the mission work of the Church, or the decoration of the sanctuary above the spiritual welfare of the kingdom. But even

¹ "Ordination Addresses," Bishop Stubbs, p. 133.

more dangerous is the growth of an insidious individualism in the heart of the parish Priest, until, not in name but in truth, he becomes the *persona* to which everything leads up, bearing in procession a rich tithe of personal honour to him who sits at the head of all the different schemes of utility which go forward in the parish.

First, there is the vanity of power. There is no doubt that a recent writer hit upon a real truth when he said that what people object to is not so much priest-craft as Rector-craft.¹ The Rector or Vicar of a parish is in a position of almost unrivalled power in his own domain. And there comes the temptation to misuse it, to resent interference or co-operation, to despise prejudices, to dislike everything which is not done by one's self or in one's own way.

Then there is the vanity of opinion. How often we hear of parishes which are being sacrificed to some passing crotchet! Here it is some piece of music, or the presence or absence of

¹ Lord Hugh Cecil. Article in *Saturday Review*, December 22, 1900.

some piece of ritual; here it is some alteration undertaken in obedience to the dictation of a passing fashion, by which the parish is convulsed, but orthodoxy is maintained. Which of us who has lived long enough, does not lament such mistakes of opinion, undertaken too often in obedience to a feeling which would not allow us to be behind the times? when we did things which we now see were mistaken, and which that whirligig of time has now proved to be wrong?

There is a petition in one of the metrical Litanies in our hymn-book, which we need to pray with all our heart: "From the love of our own way, save us, we beseech Thee."

And then there is the vanity of fame. It is astonishing to see the rivalry in services, in organizations, in choirs, yes, in numbers of communicants, fanned by statistics, and kept alive by newspaper reports and general tradition. The tendency to count heads becomes irresistible. The parish is made the measure of all things, and becomes the golden milestone from which all roads

are traced into the most distant fields of public and Catholic interest.

How seldom do we hear a cleric speak on any question, without his dropping off into the statistics of his own parish! It is natural, in some ways it is creditable, as showing that which is nearest to his heart. But let us guard against being wise in our own conceits, or falling victims to that secret vanity which can see no good in anything which is not done in our own way, preferably by ourselves.

Who has not felt the imminent danger of this vanity, in all its real emptiness, assailing our ministerial life? It will be a sorry thing if our work dies with us because it was centred in self. It will be a sad thing if, when we are moved away to some other post in God's Church, we have to see work which we had believed we had been doing for Him, come to naught, because it was personal; because really, instead of coming to the door to lead out the sheep of which we claimed the shepherding, we climbed up the back way to thief them for our own self-advancement

and self-glory ; because we knew little of the green pastures, and had little about us of that which distinguishes the beautiful, the ideal Shepherd.

IV.

In thinking, then, of vanity, that dangerous foe to the realization of our Priestly ideals, let us put before us, as the best remedy, those words of S. John, where he says, "Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."¹ Here is the remedy for self-display, to labour more and more until Christ be formed, not only in our people, but in ourselves, until we can really say, "Not I, but Christ liveth in me."² Here is the remedy for love of popularity, to be receiving grace for grace, in the life wherein one grace leads on to another, and we are seeking the honour which comes from God only. Here is the remedy for a too great individuality, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the

¹ S. John i. 16.

² Gal. ii. 20.

Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”¹

“When Satan sets thee on a pinnacle,” says an old writer, “look to thyself.”² It is a lamentable thing for a man whom God has called to the great dignity of the Priesthood, to fall overwhelmed by dizziness of a petty vanity.

¹ Eph. iv. 13.

² Burkitt, Commentary on S. Matt. iv. 8, 9.

LECTURE II.

SLOTH.

“Rest is the blessing of toil. Rest in prayer presupposes toil in prayer.”

WE pass on to-day to consider another secret hindrance which comes between us and the realization of our ideals, another baffling sin, so buried away beneath the floor of our tent that we had almost forgotten it, and that is sloth—that easy-going, simple thing, which we hardly think of as a sin, until we are sternly reminded that, in a form of it at all events, perhaps in its developed state, it ranks among those deadly sins which are regarded as eating out the life of the soul, when little by little the love of ease, the love of comfort, dislike of toil, and the weariness of the way have implanted that distaste for effort and the glories which

await effort, which finds itself at last preferring the flesh-pots of Egypt with its satisfying slavery, to all the glories of the Exodus with its ever-exacting effort.

I.

Sloth takes up its abode in the heart in such a harmless guise, that we do not at first recognize that there may come a time when we shall have a struggle to turn it out. Like the camel in the Arabian fable, it first puts in its head, and then its shoulders, and then its legs, and then its whole body, until the owner of the stall finds himself gradually ousted by an alien possessor. And sloth, like vanity, is a sin to which we clerics are specially disposed. It seems almost paradoxical, here in London, and at a time when everything around us is spinning on so fast, to speak of sloth, which we associate with fat benefices and sleepy cathedral towns, and dark ages, which one party assigns to the days of the monastic orders, another

to the early years of the eighteenth century, "We seem now to be on a treadmill, where the most idle must keep step or else be bruised by the revolving wheel of time." And yet now as much as at any former time, in London just as much as in any country village, we have anxiously to be on the look-out for the encroachments of sloth.

For sloth, in the first place, has many forms, as an examination of the terms which have been applied to it in the list of sins will show. The connection for instance, between sloth and ἀκηδεία, or even *tristitia*, is not always apparent. There is, again, the slothfulness which comes from having too much to do, as well as that which comes from having too little. Further, a traveller in a railway carriage is said to have made a subtle distinction between saying a seat was "occupied," as it was with his desk, and "engaged," which it was not. There are many occupied hours in which the man is, however, in no sense engaged. We remember how the poet has said—

*"Strenua nos exercet inertia."*¹

¹ Horace, "Ep." I. xi. 28.

There is some work which is not business, and some form of activity which is sloth. Let us not, therefore, refuse to examine even some of those varieties of the sin which may be alien to our ways. We all of us have had to do battle with it in one shape or another; it is never far absent, in some of its most disabling forms, from us who have to carry on a work which is only saved from monotony by the earnestness which we put into it, and from weariness by the freshening dew of God's continual blessing.

The Priest stands like one of those piercing-rods which is to drill holes in the face of the solid rock, through which the tunnel is to be pierced beneath the Alps. There before us is a vast mass of sin and indifference; after each effort only a few chips are displaced, and the face of the rock seems barely altered, but the power of steam is behind it, the hidden fire gives it force for its new effort; while there play upon the heated points the jets of cold water which serve to cool the fire of friction, and temper the results of the oft-repeated blows.

Let us hunt down sloth in those regions where it

may linger, even when the soul is barely conscious of its presence or disturbed by its disabilities.

II.

Obviously, in the first place, we must consider that which we commonly mean by sloth, the physical disinclination to do hard work, with all the disgraceful submission which it entails to a material slavery, which the body has riveted on the mind, on the spirit, and most of all on the will.

The warfare with the flesh, which begins in childhood with the attacks of greediness, dies down often in middle and later life into the desire for comfort, or at least into the desire to wear the cross as an ornament, rather than to be stretched hand and foot on its stern wooden discipline.

Still, by many a man the old battle of childhood has to be fought. The integrity of the day seems to depend in a provoking way on the getting up and the going to bed, which seems to be the discipline of a school-boy rather than of a grown-up man.

Yet so it is. What a lamentable thing it is to have to catch up the advancing business of the day, through hour after hour of hurried and disordered effort; and at last to attain, only with the sense that much has been lost on the way from lack of collectedness or time to ensure thoroughness! Nor is this all; to be beaten thus in the early hours of the day is to enter on its struggles with a sense of defeat and an infirmity of purpose which argues ill for future success in all the complicated issues and trials of endurance which loom in the distance through the difficulties which approach.

We have to learn more and more that the perfecting of discipline lies in these apparently little things; and that we are not likely to be able to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, if the will cannot make its authority respected as to vital arrangements of the day, because a rebellious inclination refuses to submit, and demands that self-pleasing should be put before duty. Look into the rule of monastic Orders, look into the old arrangements of offices in

the night and early morning, and see how large was the discipline exercised in the control and moderation of sleep.

Sloth, again, in these elementary forms, menaces the authority of the will in a way which springs out of the same attitude of rebellion. There are times when duty bids us leave for other things the pleasurable occupations of the moment, and there are also times when duty calls us to rise up and do that to which we have a natural disinclination, and which we view with repugnance. There is, for instance, the sloth which lingers over the morning newspaper, when conscience has long summoned us to Office, or to Meditation, or to reading, or to school, while the golden morning hours are running fast away. There is the sloth which keeps us in our chair when the hour for visiting in the parish has long come and gone. We shrink from it, it is distasteful to us, it needs a plunge; and we put it off until we say it is too late, and so defer it to another day, or to that more convenient moment which is so long in coming. Or sloth keeps us later than we need in

the friend's room, where we sit and discuss how hardly we are worked, while we pile on to the already over-burdened to-morrow the load which a quiet hour in our own room would have easily removed from our path. For sloth is an extravagant vice, it throws away odd moments of time as if they were of no value. A man of vigorous activity knows the value of rest, if he wants it; and when he wants it—at least, if it be possible—he takes it. Whereas the slothful man spoils his work-time by indolence, and robs his resting-time of its refreshment, because it fills his mind with scruples. When he is at work his mind runs to ease, when he is at rest he thinks he ought to be at work. The sworn enemy of sloth is rule, and we shall never quite escape the disquiet of its influence, or even the downright hindrance of its malignity, without some rule which either deliberately or by custom has been adopted by us. That is what we learned during our training at a theological college, to live by rule, to do certain things at certain hours because they were ordered—not to do certain things if we liked them and when we liked them,

and leave out other things which we disliked, but to take the day's routine as it came, and let the Good Shepherd lead us from one pasture to another according to His good will concerning us. So when we went into Retreat, when for those few days our life seemed so much easier, when we said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here," in all the hallowed influence of that time of spiritual joy,—then it was that we lived by rule and prayed by rule, regulated our conversation, restrained our intercourse one with another, set the will firmly on the throne, and bared the heart to the influence of the Holy Spirit. So once more in Lent we have recognized the advantages of a rule, not only in what it enables us to do, but also in the discipline which it affords us while we are doing it, and have felt the stronger for the protection which it lends to us. So it would not be amiss if we are in any danger of losing precious hours out of life for lack of management, to make a rule part of the daily machinery of our life. It is only too easy to give way to weariness and to the monotony of life, and to sink down beneath our load or to add to our

heavy burden for lack of method or proper management of our time.

Why is it that the really busy man can always find time for some useful work, whereas the idler has none to spare? It is because the busy man has learned to economize and make use of all his time to the best possible advantage. I plead for rule. Why should we not feel our way, at all events, to a general rule for our life, by a particular rule undertaken day by day for a certain period? Why should we not at our evening devotions take the coming day with its engagements and duties, and make a time-table for that one day, which we may vary the next day, and the next if we choose, according to the particular need of each as it comes? We should then bring our rising up and our lying down under obligation, our Meditations and reading would have their recognized place, instead of being regarded as tenants, liable to be turned out if their room is wanted; our recreation would be kept within bounds secured and sanctified. By this the day could be examined, and if there had been a lapse, the lapse would have

been only in the region of a rule for the day, which can be altered for to-morrow, and perhaps, as the experience has shown, ought to be altered; not the rule for a life which, when broken once or twice, sets up the hopeless feeling of an obligation difficult to pick up, and impossible to observe by reason of its vastness and extent.

III.

But if we may not ignore the ordinary dangers of physical sloth, nay more, if we must acknowledge that they are dangers to which our profession is especially liable, as being so much thrown upon its own resources, we must hasten to recognize that there are other and more subtle forms than this, against which we must strive as Priests of the Most High God.

We have been considering cases where the corruptible body presses down the mind or the will, and refuses to perform the ordinary duties required of it, or to submit to the discipline required for the

due and proper execution of life's work. But there is another and a higher region in which we may all too easily fall victims to, what may be called moral sloth: that spirit which refuses to take the necessary pains and trouble to produce what the Ordinal speaks of as the "ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ." The effort of attaining to holiness is tremendous, and many men shrink from it, and put up with lower standards, or copy ideals other than that put before us in the perfect pattern of Jesus Christ.

There are certainly not wanting signs of moral slovenliness among us at the present day, and of putting up with a kind of mechanical finish in a complacent spirit of "What lack I yet?" instead of striving after an ideal ever eluding, ever beckoning us forward, after which we yearn with all the spiritual scholarship of the saint, the devouring accuracy of the theological scientist, the determination of the idealist who cannot be satisfied with anything short of the highest. The old Tractarians are accused of being stiff and Anglican. Not so; they did but reach back in their minds to

what they believed to be the purest age of the Church, back and back, until they could catch the very glow of the Presence of Christ, and feel the ripple of His breath as He said, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you."¹ Whereas nowadays we look around us here and there and we formulate these things; where they fasted, we eat fish; where they used to spend long hours in church, we say our Office and have done with it; where they used to keep vigils and days of abstinence with some idea of their relative value in the observance of the festival, we have a system of dispensations, or other arrangements based on common sense. In the old Tractarian days, we say, there was so much fuss and private opinion, now all these matters are systematized and arranged as a matter of course. A system like this is easier and simpler, there is not nearly so much strain and uncertainty and longing; but I wonder if this is like the stencil design compared with the flowing hand of the artist, or like the work of art turned out from the shops by machinery from

¹ S, John xx, 21.

which some subtle inspiration and glow of originality has fled. It is true that machine work does not need so much trouble as that which is done in each case by the individual hand, but we do not wish in matters which concern the soul to shrink from individual effort, at the dictates of that which conspicuously resembles moral sloth.

However, to leave on one side the consideration of any merely disciplinary matters, if we turn to the deep and fundamental requirements of Christianity, Are we in any danger here of losing any distinctive beauty of character by reason of this fault which I have attempted to characterize? All around the stern outline of moral duties and divine precepts there lie those things which we may venture to call the refinements of Christianity, which do not come by nature, neither are thrown off automatically as we work, but which represent struggle and discipline and a rigorous co-operation with the Holy Spirit, so that His influence has full course and is not driven away by obstacles and hindrances interposed from within.

There is one aspect of God which the Bible never wearies of putting before us, and that is His glory and beauty. We are bidden again and again to praise God, not only for what He does, but for the way in which He does it. Think only, as an illustration of what I mean, of that glorious Hymn which we are singing through Lent, the *Benedicite* ; how utterly unmeaning it is to the prosaic mind which looks upon God merely as a storehouse of benefits to be received, or as a judge of evil committed, or as a possible element in the government of the world, with Whom it is well to keep on good terms. "O all ye works of the Lord," says the Hymn, "bless ye the Lord : praise Him and magnify Him for ever." Listen how choir joins itself to choir, the Heaven with its thunder, the murmur of the wind, the rustle of the grass, the clear piping of the birds, the lowing of the cattle, the song of the Redeemed, the shout of the warrior, things animate and inanimate, all men and all things turned towards the Lord to praise Him for what He is, to adore Him because He is glorious, to magnify Him because He is King above all. The King of Glory

passes on His way, and the flowers spring up beneath His feet, and the creature lifts its drooping head, and man forgets his aches and pains as he swings his crippled limbs into the path of progress ; he forgets to fear, he forgets even to beg. God is terrible, God is good, but God is glorious. "O come let us worship, let us praise Him and magnify Him for ever."

We should follow out this truth in our professional work ; we make a great mistake if we forget to write up over all the Ritual of the service of our daily life, "For glory and for beauty," while we lose the sense of the service done to the King of Glory before Whom we minister.

Here is a man who spends his nights and days in the service of mankind ; he is regular at his schools, the encourager of the good and the terror of the evil ; and yet he fails to win people's hearts, to attract, or even elevate. He takes no trouble to cultivate love ; he has no time to waste in conversation about children and rent and the pettiness of parish politics ; he has his work to do, and he must do it. It would be hard for that man to

cultivate love; and moral sloth compels him to forego the effort.

Here is a man, again, whom no one can accuse of indolence or neglect, but he passes through life wrapt in gloom. He is naturally, it may be, subject to depression, but he has never thought of joy as a part of the fruit of the Spirit; he, again, has no time to waste in unreal protestations of a happiness which he does not feel; and he, again, is a centre of gloom instead of a focus of light, because he cannot shake off the moral indolence which bids him lie upon his sullen bed, and hug his selfish melancholy. Here, again, is another who, being naturally nervous, makes no effort to cultivate inward peace, which is such a comfort and a stay to those who are hurried up and down in the tossing Adria of this world's troubled voyage. "Long-suffering requires a good deal more patience and time than I can bestow upon it," says another. "I do my own work as well as I can, and if I am displeased, I show it; I do not believe in coddling my people, and letting them off when they are wrong." "Gentleness is all very

well for those who live in gentle parishes," says another; "but we are all rough together here. Faith? I have trusted too much already. Just as an examiner should treat all his class as possible fools, so I treat all my people as possible rogues, and trust nobody, and then I am not taken in." "Meekness, no doubt, is very good for those who have some one to fight their battles," says another, "but I have my way to make in the world." Temperance? "I don't believe in fasting," says another. "I have to keep in health for the work I have to do; that is my main, in fact, my only, thought on the subject." And so we are in danger of casting away these beautiful refinements of Christianity which more than anything else mark out the servant of God, and give him his singular power.

Do not let us be like the man who has suffered his business to turn him into a machine, so that he forgets the amenities of life, and has no word of encouragement or sympathy for wife or child at home. Do not let us be like the speculator who seizes on the lake and mountain valley,

rippling and glowing with the glory of God, and turns it into his factory with ruthless disregard for anything but his account at the bank. The fish die, the streams are poisoned, the sky is blackened, vegetation withers, but his income grows and his work prospers; and he has no time to think of trees and streams.

There are not wanting signs to show that we are losing not only the refinements of the higher graces while we work, but also that we are losing other refinements too.

It is startling to find that an age like this, which is stupidly trying to worship æstheticism, is being captured at the same time by nastiness and moral ugliness. Are we clergy alive to this? Are we setting our faces against it sufficiently? Do we refuse to recognize cleverness as any condonation of uncleanness; or art, dramatic, artistic, or otherwise, as any compensation for vice? Are we strict enough in the requirements of a saintly nicety which we cannot forego? There is a sort of devilish converse to the flowers and clouds with which God spangles and clothes earth and heaven

in the sordid covering of man's work, and the foul rags which he wraps round his personality. Let us keep up, as we are trying to do, all refinements—yes, refinement of words, refinements of style, the refinements of tidiness and order, all the niceties of propriety, modesty, and decorum, that they may be a ritual of beauty with which we clothe the daily service of our lives, which we offer to God in our daily work.

IV.

I must ask you to go with me one step higher, and, besides the danger of physical sloth and moral sloth, to consider that which is a real and pressing danger to all of us—spiritual sloth.

Here, again, the strain that is laid upon us is immense, both in faith and spiritual practice. How easy it is to let our faith practically drop away from us, or be violently robbed from us, because we have not the energy to preserve, fortify, and defend it!

Here is a man who in an age of intense earnestness, when everything is being called in question, thinks that he can stand on one side and commit himself to nothing. Perhaps he has never really tested the grounds of his faith; he dislikes extremes; he looks upon certain doctrines as dangerous, and so he never examines them; he takes up certain forms of devotion without knowing what they mean; he neither reads nor talks with others nor seeks advice. And accordingly we are face to face to-day with our old friend Ritualism, this time as a reality; that is to say, we find churches where there is a good deal of ornament and some ceremony and much outward show, which means nothing and symbolizes nothing, and justifies itself by that most hopeless phrase, which suggests a kind of ecclesiastical music-hall, that such things ensure a bright service. Spiritual sloth is working havoc among us, as producing that dogmatic ignorance which is fatal to all solid results, and is really a branch from the deadly root of undenominationalism, which believes in nothing but views and opinions, and is fortified with

conscience clauses, and changes about with every new expression of popular unrest. "I know Whom I have believed."¹ Do let us remember that the congregation in which we minister is organically connected with the unchanging Church, which, above all things, in these quickly shifting days, needs servants who are ready to act upon convictions based on steady and practical experience and humble submission to the authoritative voice of Christian tradition.

But spiritual indolence is more wide-spreading than this. In a former lecture I spoke of prayer and its extreme difficulty. Sloth is never far away as a deterrent from things difficult of attainment. More than half our troubles, personal and parochial, are to be attributed to the very imperfect mastery which we too often have over our own devotions. Once more I would emphasize the fact that the prevailing characteristic of prayer is its difficulty as a mental task. The finding time for it, the girding up the loins of our mind for it, the putting away of distractions, all

¹ 2 Tim. i. 12.

represent a great expenditure of effort on our part. And how ready indolence, this spiritual sloth, is just to take our prayers as they come, without effort, without love, without any attempt at spiritual and intellectual nicety in their offering! Indolence has its formula always ready, that distraction at prayer is inevitable, and if it can only succeed in calling it a venial sin, the very title seems theological and attractive; the whole thing fits into a system, and we cease to trouble ourselves about it.

But, for all that, our work is suffering. Prayer was the influence to which we trusted to permeate our work; instead of that, work is ruining our prayer. Let us beware of those wise suggestions, as they seem, which come at prayer-time, the easy solution of the difficulty, the convincing speech which we are going to make, the measures to be devised against the, as yet, shapeless obstacles which, themselves shadows, menace our cloud-castles in the air. Those suggestions are always bad, and should always be rejected because they are done not only without God, but in defiance

of Him, and in time filched from His service in the most hypocritical manner. Our sacred times of prayer represent too often, in the region of the spirit, a scene not dissimilar to that offered by "Paul's Walk" in this cathedral in the days of the early Stuarts.

Here is one very practical way of dealing with spiritual sloth, namely, to refuse to condone, sanction, or put up with distracting thoughts in prayer. Malarial fever, as we know, has now been traced to mosquito-bites, and immunity from its attacks depends practically on the protection of a few mosquito-nets. It will be found, I doubt not, that the fever and unrest of the soul which so disquiet us, may in their turn be referred to the bites of those distracting thoughts which find their way into our hearts out of our daily work. What we need here too for our protection is nets—a determined and rigorous shutting off of all those things which are likely to distract us, by such preparations negative and positive as may secure us immunity under attack.

Again and again it is found that it is by

attention to little things that great gains and great immunities are secured. We may be sure that sloth has inflicted on us a deadly defeat when it has succeeded in persuading us that prayerlessness is our normal state, that we cannot help it, and that distractions are human and inevitable.

Meditation, in the same way, comes in for even more than its share of attack at the hands of spiritual sloth, and for the same reason that it is difficult. Meditation is not obnoxious to the danger of formality which discharges an obligation by reciting a form of words ; it postulates some sort of thought, and that original thought, some sort of freedom of approach to God without being tied by the words of others, however consecrated and holy they may be. But thought requires effort, and there are all manner of lions in the path which leads to our Meditation. Either we have no natural aptitude, or our thoughts lead to nothing profitable, or the thoughts of others are better, and we should be more suitably engaged in reading what they have to say. Or the time is wanted for something else, or we spend too much time upon ourselves. There

is no need to look far to find a suitable excuse wherewith to deck our spiritual sloth in a dress more than decent and which is even suggestive of higher spiritual wisdom. Surely we need to learn more and more that spiritual exercises and the methods which lead to spiritual advancement need just as much patient and laborious development as do those methods which belong to mental training, or what is now known as physical culture. Look only at the professional in music, and the laborious hours of practice and study which are necessary to his proficiency in the art. Look at him again who wishes to be an expert even in a game, how earnestly and minutely he toils to obtain the mastery to which he has devoted his energies. We have to rescue spirituality from the low estimate in which it is held, as the refuge for the physically incapable or the mentally deficient. Do we not sometimes hear, at the end of a series of disparaging remarks which are directed to the demolition of a man's reputation, "But for all that, he is a very good man"? As if goodness were a simple and common thing, easy of attainment and

immeasurably beneath other recognized spheres of excellence. I claim for spirituality a place beside, nay, above, cleverness or even genius. And I claim that we clergy should make more of a professional study of it than we do, while we recognize its dignity and importance. As in a University a degree may be gained through many and various courses of study—through philosophy, or science, history; so in the world's school of excellence, there is a place, and the highest place, to be won by those who have studied and laboured in the school of spirituality. We give religion a bad name, we render holiness ridiculous, if we do not put our whole strength into it, that is to say, if we give way to spiritual sloth.

Time wasted in perfunctory religious exercises is not the same thing as time laboriously spent in earnest prayer. A man may reasonably doubt whether his Priest is as profitably employed as he might be, if he finds him gabbling through an unwilling task from which all who can conveniently do so have escaped. He may reasonably doubt whether Holy Orders is the highest profession, if

he finds that the opening of the treasures on Sunday only brings to light old platitudes and new errors. He may reasonably question whether spirituality has any solid value, when he finds so little practical help, so little nice instinct or far-seeing counsel, in the man who has been set over him in the Lord to guide him through things temporal to things eternal.

Holiness is a long and difficult task in its achievement, and requires a constant and minute labour, if we are to attain to it. To administer the Sacraments will make itself felt as a strain; even to say the Divine Office will make itself felt as a spiritual and intellectual effort. So, also, to preach a sermon will be a giving out of self which will entail some spiritual and mental fatigue. It is easy enough to read out an essay, it is easy enough to give out a few plain and unprepared thoughts; but to deliver a message, even a well-known message, will entail some expenditure of force, which may well make a man hesitate when he is asked "just to come and preach a sermon," as if it were the same thing as singing a song or reading a chapter out of a book.

At a time like this, when so much is being said about the clergy and religion which is harsh and unkind, we must be doubly on the alert to see that religion, of which we are the professed exponents and teachers, takes its proper place. Where everything is pushed to its utmost limits, religion will have but a poor chance, if we do not put our whole strength into it as we present it to the people. The hard-worked man must get out of the way of thinking that he begins his day and carries on his day and finishes his day, at a rate of pressure of which the clergy know little. We must get out of the way of letting ourselves be convenient supernumeraries at parties where real business men are never or rarely seen. We must show the refinements and the beauties of Christianity at work; that love, and humility, and gentleness, and refinement, are no exotics which live under glass in certain well-protected lives, but that they can grow and flower under most adverse conditions. Above all, we must elevate our profession out of the unworthy conception which ignorance and prejudice are too ready to

fasten on it. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."¹ We must labour on, if we are to dignify our profession. And if we are to accept from our people the ready excuse that "he who labours prays" as justifying their neglect of religious exercises, we must be able to show them that he who prays labours, as our justification for the hours that we spend in what they think idleness, but in what we believe and know to be hard and profitable toil.

¹ S. John v. 17.

LECTURE III.

DESPONDENCY.

“Hopes have precarious life :
They are oft blighted, withered, snapt sheer off :
But faithfulness can feed on suffering,
And knows no disappointment.”

I.

It is not always easy to induce men to assign a state of mind such as despondency to its proper position.

The reckless, noisy daring of sin, with its strange and excessive laughter and gait, proclaim what sort of thing it is. But the solemn and sedate melancholy in its staid and sombre garb, seems to belong to a man who has a higher ideal than anything which he can see realized in things around him, and is as one who sits down and weeps because, being in Babylon, he remembers Zion.

The despondent man will not recognize his place among those who offer a blemished offering to the Lord. On the contrary, he will tell you he is one who, seeing things as they are, cannot but mourn and weep because all is out of joint. With the Psalmist, his eyes gush out with water because men keep not God's Law.¹ And yet, with our eye on God's revealed will, and the world with its many needs, while we look at the roundness and perfectness of Christian character, we are forced to say that to be despondent, gloomy, and downcast is to have missed the distinguishing characteristic of Christianity, which is joy; is to have deprived the world in which we live of the sunlight which we were meant to shed around us, and in our own lives to exhibit nothing less than a triumph of his influence who is known as the devil, who bends all his efforts, and levels all his slanders to this end—that he may make the heart of the righteous sad, and produce that state of fret in which a man is moved to do evil.

Difficult as it may be to command, difficult to

regulate, and difficult to turn into its proper channel, joy is the strength of the Christian, while despondency is his weakness and danger. Joy, we must remember, comes from within, it is not really dependent on circumstances, not even on health and prosperity. As Dean Church has told us in his sermon on "Foreign Travel," lazy, unintelligent travelling is like lazy reading: in reading, what we learn and what delights us is in proportion to what we bring of our own: "We receive but what we give."¹ So it is in life; if we have not the faculty for joy within, we multiply all in vain the things which are calculated to inspire and promote it. Joy is a bright sun set in the firmament of our life, which may be obscured by a passing cloud, but can never be obliterated. When the cloud has rolled away, still it will be there. Even across the rain of our tears it will sit enthroned in rainbow splendour. It will be true to him who has realized this wonderful capacity from within, "Your joy no man taketh from you."²

¹ Dean Church, "Pascal and Other Sermons," p. 289.

² S. John xvi. 22.

It is not a good sign when we become gloomy, morose, and depressed; when the light fades out of our eyes, and the elasticity passes from our steps, and the power of being pleased is gone; when enthusiasm in others only irritates, and our neighbour's buzzing life awakens only the desire to kill it and stop the monotonous whirr of his inordinate self-congratulation. There is something wrong when we break with our happy past, and completely sever the ties which bind our days "each to each by natural piety." It is not grief that has to answer for it, nor loss, nor disappointment, nor ill health. It is the sorrow of the world, however we disguise it, which has come upon one who has fallen out of correspondence with God. "The joy of the Lord is your strength."¹ If we are conscious to ourselves of a cynical gloom which poisons everything about us, it must needs make us anxious. There is a selfishness about melancholy which good people are apt to forget, a selfishness which is in itself a defect, and indicates more than appears on the

¹ Neh. viii. 10.

surface. Faith finds no rest for the sole of her foot in a heart like this; Hope only flies up and down over a waste of water from which no green thing emerges, in a possibility of brighter days; and Love yields sorrowfully to a grudging discontent, or is supplanted by a sullen acquiescence in the inevitable, known as resignation.

If God has given us the capacity for joy, or rather if we have not maimed it by wilfulness or destroyed it by sin, we have a blessing which will stand us in good stead in many a dark time of sorrow, and in many a moment of cruel privation. The child of the world, jaded with vanity, sated with plenty, and wearied with the long chase of an ever-vanishing joy, stands amazed at the simple happiness of him who has learnt to find joy in himself, and not in the shifting chance of circumstance. Like the chief captain of old, half amazed, half scornful, he says, "With a great sum obtained I this freedom;" while the soul which is alive unto God, from Whom all joys do come, is able to answer with a confidence born of experience, and of thankfulness

which is the child of piety, "But I was free born."¹

And yet despondency is a conspicuous clerical fault. We all of us have our dark moments, but do not let us nurse them; for Elijah is never less like Elijah than when he throws himself down and wishes to die because he has mistaken his powers, lost his sense of proportion, underestimated his own success, and has believed it possible that God can fail, or the world be emptied of goodness, or protest have lost its power.

Most of us at some time or other have to fight a battle with despondency and to resist that particular assault of Satan which takes the shape of depression. The sunniest life has its shadows, and the most successful career its moments of apparent failure. And God would surely wish us to take seriously these times of our tribulation; not to faint under them, nor yet attempt to ignore them, and certainly not to humour them. More depends on our attitude than we should care to believe; and the sinfulness of

¹ Acts xxi. 28.

despondency is more far-reaching than we at first sight imagine. The hopeful, cheerful, joyful man is a tower of strength wherever he is. Man can look to him as—

“One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward ;
Never doubted clouds would break ;
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would
triumph ;
Held, we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.”¹

But for a Priest to fall a victim to despondency is “as when a standard-bearer fainteth.”² And the cause of God languishes, and the chariot-wheels of prayer go heavily.

II.

Now, clerical despondency takes many forms. First of all, we are tempted to despair of the State, that is, to lose heart because of the conditions of the Church or the world in that particular moment in which we are called upon by God to live. It

¹ Browning.

² Isa. x. 18.

is the besetting danger of old men to look back on the past as a golden age from which every year, as it slips away, shows a marked decadence. It is the tendency of active, eager minds, who have long watched the game evolving itself, to think that all is lost because they do not understand the meaning of one move. More than this, the waves of progress are long, and cover many generations. It may happen that those who live in one generation may see nothing but ebb, hear nothing but the gasp of the receding tide, and the rattle of the pebbles which fall away from the shore, leaving bare patches of barren sand. They do not know of, they will not live to see, the returning wave fuller and richer, which will reach points hitherto untouched. It may be true—people say that it is—that the wave is running out strongly with the new century, the great Victorian age is gasping and rattling away in thin threads of receding vigour, with lower aims, meaner ideals, less vigorous ambitions, with few great men, in Church or State, in poetry, art, or enterprise. As each goes away, more despairing

is the cry, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!"¹ It may be so. There are such times. But if there is an ebb, there is also a flow.

"Say not the struggle naught availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

"If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

"For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main;

"And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly!
But westward look, the land is bright."²

God rules in His own world, and it is He that orders the length and extent of these ebbs and flows. Never let us lose sight of this, or we shall begin to despair. If God depended on man, things might be different; but we soon learn, by

¹ 2 Kings xiii. 14.

² Clough, "Poems."

many a humbling lesson, that there "is no such thing as a necessary man."

It has indeed been said that "the work only exists for the sake of the man;" that is to say, that all the obstacles and complications which meet us in life are only so many means by which to develop character in the individual. But this can hardly be accepted as an adequate account of the mysteries of God's providential dealing with His creatures. Surely our despondency and anxiety arise from the fact that we have too low an estimate of the great work of God, and what it really means. Look at the genealogy of our blessed Lord in the pages of the Gospel, and see how long it took, what generations of ebb and flow, to produce the fulness of time for the Incarnation. Who, of those who lived in those times, would have recognized in Rahab, or Ruth, or Bathsheba, an integral and necessary link in the development of Messiah's kingdom? Who would have recognized, in the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, with their petty kings and degenerate subjects, the peculiar people prepared

for the Lord, out of whom should come the promised Seed? The time came, indeed, when prophecy itself ceased, and great men died out of the land, all in accordance with the Divine scheme. Israel had never reached so low an ebb as when Zacharias and Elizabeth, with a faithful unknown few, represented the expectation of the world and its preparation for the supreme moment in all history. The sceptre had departed from Judah, and the law-giver from between his feet;¹ but at the last moment, when the degradation of Israel had reached almost its lowest point, and the co-operation of man was most feeble in an age barren of great names, when no prophets or leaders could be found, the light burst forth, and the day dawned to which all ages have turned with adoration and awe.

We do not know sufficiently the ways of God, our life is not long enough, nor our grasp sufficiently firm, to be able to say of the scheme of God, that it is failing or tottering, or that an age of reaction or mediocrity means an enfeeblement

¹ Gen. xlix. 10.

of the imperial designs of the great Ruler of the world. Neither, again, do we know who are the workmen that are needed for the particular moment in the evolution of the scheme. Judæa in the days of Cæsar Augustus would hardly have been regarded as the lever of the world. The fishermen on a tiny lake in a petty kingdom would hardly have entered into the calculations of a Roman statesman, even in an age of upstarts and enthusiasts. And yet the name of S. Peter now dominates the Imperial City, where the names of many of her great generals have vanished, and her empire has crumbled in the dust. How often have we seen the man of inferior capacity, with a more slender endowment and feebler intellect, who has yet done more for his generation than the great ones whom God has enriched with singular and commanding powers! Do we really know what it is to be a great man, in the sense in which greatness is needed for the work of God? Our blessed Lord told us that in His estimation to serve was to be great; God raises up His own men for His own special purpose, and to

carry out His own plans in the unbroken and continual scheme of His unswerving purpose. Many a man who is thrust into prominence, as he sees the mighty heroes whom he has venerated passing away from him, may well cry out in despair, that he is put into a position for which he has neither capacity nor inclination. But if he is true and faithful, he will rouse himself and respond to the call of God, in the spirit in which Mordecai answered Esther: "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"¹ The age of great men may seem to have passed away; if so, when God wants great men He will raise them up. But the age of useful men never passes away. If He has called me, He will enable me to answer His call, if it be only to occupy a simple and unknown position in His kingdom. There are times when the humblest workman who clings to his post is as serviceable to Israel as the brilliant man whose counsels are as the chariot and whose resourceful strength is as those horsemen who are the protection of Israel.

¹ Esth. iv. 14.

At what period of the history of the Church are we to place that golden age, which, in our dark moments, we believe once to have existed, and now to have passed away? Has there been such an age? Has there ever been a time when the spiritually despondent could find no food for their despair, or spur to the torments of their imagination? Dean Church has warned us against the temptation "to think that things threatened are lost; to think that because things are injured they are utterly ruined."¹ A man who works on, believing that all his work is destined to be swept away by a gathering storm of irresistible evil, works without hope: and hopeless work can never be the best or the most durable work. Men have a right to expect that, if we aspire to lead them into battle, they should not see in our faces that fixed look of despair which has already practically accepted defeat, before striking a blow or measuring the strength of the enemy's assault.

¹ Dean Church, "Cathedral and University Sermons," p. 215.

III.

But it is not only as we look out over the storm-swept surface of the world's troubled sea, lashed with strife and controversy, and dark with evil, that we are tempted to lose heart. The blemish of despondency gathers intensity when its effect has become more concentrated within the narrower limits of the parish or sphere of work to which God, in His good providence, has called us. We all know the despondent parish Priest. He ministers in church with the air of a martyr, leading the worship of a congregation daily becoming smaller and smaller. He has said that it is no good striving against the prevailing indifference; the choir only sing for self-display, the people who come to church only do so at the bidding of respectability; no one attends to what he says, or cares for his exhortations. He has long given up visiting the people. What is the good? People only welcome him for what they can get. He has

parted with his schools; for although hitherto he has been able to meet the necessary expenditure, how can he hope to do so another year? Every institution is in decay or in debt. The whole parish is like some dreary level across whose colourless plains drives a thin drizzling rain, which takes away the beauty from things beautiful, and accentuates the ugliness in things ugly. There is no sun,—it has gone, and from the life of the Priest spreads a mist of gloom and despair, until there arises a “darkness which may be felt.” This is not an unknown case, even if it be here stated in its most extreme form. I think we all shall agree that it is very hard to keep up hopefulness in the face of persistent failure; and when hopefulness has gone, cheerfulness soon follows in its wake; and when cheerfulness has gone, the power of work speedily shares in its downfall; and it is like the curse which fell upon Eden with the Fall,—it is a “change of order from the keeping of the garden to the tilling of the ground,”¹ from work to labour, from joy in willing production to sweat in exacted toil.

¹ Ruskin.

We have no right to be melancholy and despondent. Other people's lives and interests besides our own depend on our attitude. You have noticed in this London of ours how, when buildings are rising with threatening front, to the detriment of the health and sweetness of the immediate surroundings of those who will be overshadowed by them, there is hung out the protest which claims a privilege—a protest which asserts a right and interest in the blessed sunlight which selfishness threatens to obscure. Let us remember, if we have ceased to care for ourselves and our own real happiness, that our people have their rights in our cheerfulness, happiness, and joy and that we have no business to make their hearts sad, while we nurse a selfish grief and a faithless despair, and forget the serious obligations which lie upon a teacher of men, even if he feels the danger of his position, at least not to betray it to those who have to enter into the conflict.

Let us be very careful, therefore, to watch the beginnings of this insidious and damaging fault. There are certain causes at work, always tending

to produce it, if they are not resolutely resisted at the outset.

1. Among these, perhaps, should be placed, first of all, monotony, the sense of weariness which comes over a man from having to do the same things day after day, whether he feels inclined for them or not. We trace indications of this spirit in various ways. There is, perhaps, the letter to the newspaper, or the speech at the Ruridecanal conference, complaining of the needless repetitions in the Daily Office. The Lord's Prayer comes too often, or the Psalms are too long, or one Lesson is sufficient, or the Venite should certainly be omitted from Matins, or the Magnificat dropped at Evensong or at least varied with the alternative Psalm. Then there follows the plea that the Office itself is a pure waste of time; that literary, platform, or parochial work would be more appropriate substitutes. Then after the Office comes the turn of the school. The monotony of teaching becomes intolerable; the Priest speedily finds that he has no aptitude for that sort of thing, that he was not ordained to be a schoolmaster; in fact, he may be

accentuating sectarian bitterness, and giving a new meaning to the conscience clause which represents the tender care of our Government for the religious welfare of our children. And after the schools comes the parochial visiting. It must be much less frequent, or it will lose its freshness. It becomes less and less, until it ceases altogether. And the abyss of tea-parties, tennis, and the corresponding amusements which belong to town life are waiting to receive him who flies from the terrors of monotony. It is a real danger, and no doubt our work will become monotonous, unless the life within is maintained at a high level. The world without notes the aspect of him who has learned something of that wonderful attribute of the Almighty, "Whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting"¹—the power of perpetual spring vigour and creativeness,—they call it enthusiasm; and he who possesses it will accept their verdict in the true meaning of the word, because he knows that it is the God within Who is working, because he knows that the radiance of Divine beauty which plays around the

¹ Micah v. 2.

recitation of his Office has long ago robbed it of all monotony, that he can come in tired and heartsore, and bathe himself in the cool freshness of the Psalter: "Fret not thyself because of the ungodly: neither be thou envious against the evil-doers, for they shall soon be cut down like the grass: and be withered even as the green herb. Put thou thy trust in the Lord, and be doing good: dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."¹ The Gospel Canticles speak to him of the Divine aid which is with him and beside him in his struggles; and the Lessons speak to him as with the consoling voice of God. So when he visits his schools, monotony has long given place to the absorbing and painful interest which he takes in the growing struggle between good and evil there being worked out before him in those little lives. Interests which make him feel ashamed of emotion wasted on fiction or the chances of a game, start forth and take possession of his life. Monotony is like friction on a wheel, it shows either there is something out of gear, or else there is need for the soothing oil of

¹ Ps. xxxvii. 1-3.

grace to allay that dangerous irritation which will end either in suspended work or in a widespread catastrophe.

2. And then, besides monotony, we have to watch the growth of a sense of failure, which sometimes paralyzes a man. It is hard to bear, God knows, the good work all wasted, the young life which suddenly snaps in our moulding hands, the prodigal who contemptuously asks to leave home. It is hard to see the guild we have nourished break up, the choir utterly fail of its purpose, the hard daily work apparently show no result. What a temptation it is spiritually to sulk, to say we cannot try any more, to let things go, to say, "They love to have it so, let it be!" What a temptation to play the part of the old prophet to the young men out of Judah who come to help us, with their ardent schemes, their generous self-devotion, and their splendid enthusiasm!—just to say, "'I am a prophet also as thou art.'¹ I have seen all these efforts made before. There is nothing to be done; let things be, and come home and eat bread with me;

¹ 1 Kings xiii, 18.

and let us take things easily, and let alone the denunciation of enthroned abuse, or, if we have made that mistake, as speedily as possible to obliterate ourselves !” How quickly we may reach that dreadful condition of even disliking success in others because it has not originated with ourselves, and so, through depression, discouragement, and even slander, to pull down the life whose activity puts our supineness to shame, and whose earnestness threatens to disturb our acquiescence in failure ! And then comes the temptation to think that the time has come for us to leave our work, that failure here is an indication that we should succeed elsewhere, and that success is awaiting us in some distant post, to which we are ideally adapted, and where failure will never come.

Surely, when smarting under the bitterness of failure, we should remember the ingratitude which is daily showered on the Almighty and beneficent God. No father of any prodigal ever grieves more for his erring son, than does the tender and all-loving God for His sinful children. “God is

provoked every day ;”¹ and yet His sun rises with unerring, unstinted munificence day by day on those who day by day despise and misuse His compassion. Dean Church once more has told us that “the parable of the sower reminds us that God is not afraid to risk failure.” God accomplishes His purpose in many ways, and one of them we know, by the highest of all examples, is the way of what seems irretrievable disaster. The followers of the Cross have no right to look *in their own day* for the recognition of success.² A despondent man in his parish is doomed to failure ; and, what is more, he is not always free from the disabling sin of pride. Things being as they are, and we being what we are, have we a right to expect success ? If we are to wait until we can ensure success, and only to work when we succeed, we shall be poor followers of the Crucified. The sense of monotony can be cast on one side by the gradual development of life within. The sense of failure itself can be used, not to nourish

¹ Ps. vii. 12.

² Dean Church, “Cathedral and University Sermons,” p. 252.

a disabling despondency, but to produce that sense of dependence on God, "without Whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy," and Who conquers by defeat, and advances by failure, and does not expect us to succeed, if only we are content to do our duty, and leave the issues to Him.

IV.

Once more despondency exhibits itself within a narrower circle still, namely, the circle of our own spiritual life. If we get out of heart with the times, if we despair of our parish, we most certainly become despondent about the state of our own soul. We have already considered the peculiar malice of the devil which exhibits itself in annoyance and disquieting influences, even when he cannot succeed in successfully lodging his temptations. The depressing effect of evil suggestions, the haunting imputation of motives either evil or short of the highest, the suggested consent in evil

where really no consent has been given, the general impression that the devil sometimes contrives to leave of failure and evil desire,—all these can very easily set up a spiritual despondency which is a fruitful seed-bed of all manner of evil. We are apt to forget that our spiritual life needs to be treated in a serious and business-like fashion; we ought to know something of the exact state of our souls, as far as it is possible for a man to know it, and not leave ourselves at the mercy of impressions. Hence the value of systematic self-examination, of keeping some record of our daily state before God. We are apt, on a cursory examination of conscience, either to take the estimate which the devil wishes to establish, and think ourselves worse than we really are; or take a casual, insincere glance into our state, and imagine ourselves to be advancing when we really are going back. A careful record of our sins will then help us to have a just view of our real position. It will often show us that we have been really advancing when despondency gave us only a melancholy sense of repeated and

renewed failure. And even, if it be so, the real knowledge that we have failed will quicken our determination to be up and doing, and to strike a blow for freedom. Spiritual despondency is a dangerous and depressing state, from which we must hasten, by God's grace, to extricate ourselves.

In spite of all that God has said, how slow we are to believe that He really has forgotten the past! This sense of disability by reason of past sins may become a serious hindrance, if we are not careful. God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."¹ We must firmly lay hold of this truth, as the very citadel of our hope, and refuse to be drawn from it. Most certainly, if we have not reckoned with the past, it will come back again and again with deadly persistency. Again and again the spectres of things done in the past on which we have turned our backs, will stand out in shadowy form in front of the duties and projects which lie before us, and we shall see everything only through the haunting medium of their presence. Things done at school, the follies of a college career,

¹ 1 S. John i. 9.

indiscretions even, careless words and thoughts, rise up and say, "The quest is not for thee." We perhaps hardly realize the persistency with which God tells us that we must not keep these things rankling in our hearts. He requires that past,—it is not to be shut off from Him, but purified and utilized. There is experience in it, there is penitent love in it, there is hope to be gathered out of it. And it is for us "to go in procession on those bitternesses of our soul,"¹ to acquire by confession and contrition, even more than amendment, a virtue out of the past, which God knows how to extract even from its most deadly poison.

And so with the present. Do we make enough of the companionship and comfort of God? We are terribly conscious of the nearness of evil which forces itself upon us without respect for the dignity of our free will. God is closer to us than evil. Only He tenderly waits in His respect for our free will, that we should invite Him in, and ask for His companionship and sympathy. The help of God, the felt help of God, might be stronger

¹ Isa. xxxviii. 15.

than the awful strength of an evil suggestion; (and, God knows, that is strong enough). Why do we not know more then of the sweet companionship, of that comforting strength—we who are so quickly cast down because Satan thrusts his unwelcome presence upon us? “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”¹ Why, when Satan has bespattered us with foul suggestions, or tripped us up, and set traps in our way, do we not go straight to God, and tell Him then and there our sorrow and our pain? Why do we not ask Him to join us in our walk? to go with us up the stair to the sick-room? to come with us when we go after the lost sheep? Surely spiritual despondency would cease if we had God for our companion—God, “the Strength of all them that put their trust in Him;” God, “the King of Glory;” God, “the Lord of Hosts;” God, the true, the beautiful Shepherd! There is a sunlight which streams from His presence before which the dark clouds of despondency will roll themselves up

¹ Isa. lxvi. 13.

and depart, driven away by the brightness of His beams.

Or is it the future which terrifies us? Is it the feeling that we cannot hold out against the repeated assaults of a never-ceasing temptation? Is it the sense that victory now, only means a return of evil with gathering and intensified malignity? So Satan plies us with fear, but God, on the other hand, would have us feel that every triumph won leaves us a little stronger, and more certain of success. He points out that one of the sufferings of the Cross, which we have to share with Him, is the lingering pain of a lifelong death unto sin. He speaks to us in solemn words whose very sternness braces us: "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."¹ Most true it is that the very persistency of small temptations aggravates them into a burden which sometimes is intolerable; but there must be no giving in, for these stinging flies are often called forth by the very brightness of the sun whose presence we would not forego, even if temptation becomes

¹ S. Matt. xxiv. 13.

the more irritating because of its warmth and brilliancy. Temptation, so far from being a cause for despondency, may be an actual cause of joy. It may be a sign that we are succeeding, and that Satan is therefore turning the full fury of his attack upon us. It may be that, as the shepherd is bringing home his flock, he may expose himself to the violent onslaught of the wolf. It is a long weary struggle, but on no account must there be any yielding to despondency. Surely we must feel that we Christians are put on our mettle to show that there is light in our dwellings, when an Egyptian darkness seems gathering over so much of the advanced materialism of the day! We are told that melancholy is settling down over life, over art and poetry and civilization. If so, it is only what we may expect in an age which has tried to forget God. But we Priests are brought day by day into constant intercourse with Him. On our faces there must needs be some of the glow which belongs to those who frequently look upon God. Joy, and not despondency, is the heritage of the Priest; and if sometimes we find

it hard, with failing health and failing income, when blow after blow falls upon us, still to rejoice in the Lord, let us remember Him "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross."¹ To be melancholy and despondent is, after all, to strike a discordant note in this world of beauty, and to despair of God is really to have parted with faith. "Woe unto him that is faint-hearted, for he believeth not; therefore shall he not be defended."²

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

² Ecclus. ii. 13.

LECTURE IV.

IMPATIENCE.

“*Melius est claudicare in viâ quam currere extra viam.*”

I.

IF Despondency sometimes poses as the generous dissatisfaction of the idealist, and almost persuades us that it is a virtue, activity too has its parasitic vice, and would try to convince us that Impatience is but the protest of a nature which resents the curb and fret of circumstance or, like ambition, is but an infirmity of noble minds in the full flush of their power.

There is something grand about the impatience of a Moses, or the headlong impetuosity of a Saul of Tarsus. The methods of the Sons of Thunder are congenial to us, and we sympathize with the headstrong vehemence of a S. Peter, who cannot

wait to think, or stop even to consult the dictates of his reason. No doubt a noble impatience has been at the bottom of many reforms; but for all that, it would seem to be uniformly discouraged by the precepts of Christianity, it has more than once been severely punished, and is without doubt a serious blemish in the lives of those whose soul should be waiting still upon God, who should be tarrying the Lord's leisure, with a heart calm and unruffled, directed by heavenly influences into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.¹ The order of Christ is clear and unmistakable: "Take up the cross daily, and follow Me."² "In your patience possess ye your souls,"³ says our blessed Lord, in the face of much which is disturbing and distressful around us. "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake,"⁴ is the lesson which the active and vigorous Saul has to spell out—through many years of toil and suffering. The secret of the Lord needs a long and patient

¹ 2 Thess. iii. 5.

² See S. Mark viii. 34.

³ S. Luke xxi. 19,

⁴ Acts ix, 16,

unravelling. His hand cannot be forced, nor His counsels hurried. "God is patient, because He is eternal," and we who work for eternity and not for this life only, must be patient too. If we read the history of God's will as revealed to us in Holy Scripture, it is a long record of sublime patience slowly evolving a great purpose. The ruined world had to be restored; but there were times in that period of restoration when everything seemed to be plunging from bad to worse. Promises remained unfulfilled to those who had staked their very existence on their truth. Prophecies seemed to remain only as unwarranted predictions; and the obstinacy of man again and again seemed to triumph over the purpose of God. Yet still the will of God held on to its appointed end. And it has been the joy and patience of saints to watch for this. "Lo, we have waited for Him!"¹ is their joyful cry. "The Lord God of Israel hath raised up a mighty salvation for us . . . As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world

¹ Isa. xxv. 9.

began.”¹ “You can hurry man,” said Bishop Milman; “but you cannot hurry God.” He can wait until the work of each age has been woven into the slowly evolving design of His providence. He can wait while nations seem to throw off His allegiance, only to come back to Him under the stress of calamity. He can use war, pestilence, and famine, and turn them into beneficent remedies which shall heal the sores of a shaking land, and steady the destiny of a tottering nation. He can wait until hunger and nakedness and shame have done their work with the prodigal, “patient because He is eternal;” whereas impatience has no courage that it should wait, no endurance that it should submit, no wisdom that it should stay itself upon God, and loses us too often a land of richer promise than that which was denied to Moses, who gave way to provocation and could not patiently endure, but made haste in the time of trouble.

¹ S. Luke i. 68, etc., Prayer-book Version.

II.

As Priests, we shall be tempted over and over again to impatience.

1. It is likely to become more and more the besetting sin of those who see the highway of progress in science and in almost every other direction being carried in a straight course over hill and vale, levelled and prepared for its triumphant advance. Where God in the things of this world seems to move so fast, in the things which concern His kingdom, He seems to us so slow. No royal road has been discovered into Canaan : sin has not budged an inch from its commanding heights ; drunkenness, lust, deceit, and other vices still sweep all before them ; and nineteen centuries of Christianity have failed to unmask sin's deadly face, or rob temptation of its power. We must still go round Jericho, with the long procession as of old ; we must still send Naaman to Jordan ; still linger round the stern simplicity of the old commandments, just as they came

forth from the lightnings of Sinai. Still they remain the same—the Church, the Word, the Sacraments. Where the world moves so fast, why does God move so slowly? We get impatient; and our impatience is more serious than we think,—it is impatience with God. Have you ever thought what his peculiarities must have been to the Jew, in his dealings with the nations around him; such as the prohibition which forbade him to mingle with other people—the prohibition which prevented him from multiplying horses, or from fortifying himself with worldly alliances? The call to the Jews to rest in the sense of God's protection, and in the privilege of being His heritage, again and again seems to have jarred upon that common desire of human nature, to be like other people, and to commend one's self to the world by at least showing that we are not behind the ordinary methods of the day. The world as it gets older and pushes its conquests further into the region of material advance, does not become more enamoured of the supernatural. My brethren, are we being tempted to get a little impatient of the restraints

put upon us by a supernatural Church, which holds in its hands a supernatural Bible, and administers supernatural Sacraments, and appeals to the unseen and eternal as against the seen and temporal ?

(1) Is there not a reckless readiness to take up with critical conclusions built upon hypotheses which have not even a tortoise to stand upon, and to accept methods of arbitrary and conjectural criticism, which, as we have been reminded by one of the shrewdest historical minds of our day, applied to Greek or Roman, or even Anglo-Saxon literature, would have been laughed out of court ? ¹ It is a long trial to our patience to have to defend some antiquated miracle in the Old Testament, or to justify some action in the dim past or to allow something to remain as an unexplained difficulty, in the face of free-and-easy methods which smooth down the whole surface of mysterious and disputable facts into a parabolic, or mythic, or even economic arrangement, which modern wisdom has settled and disposed of, in its most minute particulars, with more than Divine omniscience.

¹ Bishop Stubbs, "Ordination Addresses," p. 150.

And yet the history of surrenders and graceful concessions is not encouraging. Either we find ourselves suddenly in rapid flight before a new contingent of critics who have routed those with whom we had confidently symbolized, or else we find ourselves arrested before some tremendous chasm, where we shrink from following. We are confronted now at the present moment with an attack delivered upon the very citadel of our Faith, the Incarnation. The miraculous has been cleared away, now here and now there: it is only an Old Testament miracle, it is only a misunderstood theory of inspiration, it is only the testimony of our blessed Lord, the limitations of Whose earthly knowledge the Church has hitherto strangely misunderstood! until suddenly we find ourselves face to face with that stupendous mystery, the Virgin-birth. And we are not asked to deny it, only not to insist on it; and we are assured that we can be as good Christians as ever with a Bible reduced to a few seriously damaged books, a Christ Who could make mistakes, and a Saviour Who entered this world without any miraculous

intervention at all. Do not let us shrink from that particular form of patience which has to submit to the imputation of a stupid conservatism, or to an ostracism from the best-informed circles of modern inquiry. Every tentative scheme, every daring conjecture, every revolutionary hypothesis, whether it concerns the Bible, or the plays of Shakespeare, or the most established traditions of the day, is proclaimed with the most absolute certainty, fortified with anathemas and defended with damnatory clauses of the most sweeping ferocity. And it requires patience even to know how to wait, and to see, as we do see again and again, the reaction which leaves things just as they were before, save that the ground is strewn with the bodies of those who have fallen down in the long weariness which comes upon those who find that they have been following blind leaders, whom they took at their own valuation as "masters of those that know." Patience to sit still under the provocation of conflicting voices, is a virtue which we all need at the present time.

(2) And not only are we in danger of impatience with the supernatural Word, but also with the supernatural Church. Men have a perpetual quarrel with the limitations imposed by Almighty God. It is intolerable to many minds that any doctrine or any ordinance should be spoken of as "necessary to salvation." And although we doubtless have ceased ourselves to feel any difficulty on this head, even if we once did so, yet we shrink from emphasizing the peculiarity of our position before a world whose feeling on this point is diametrically opposed to that which we are called upon to teach. Some solve the difficulty by systematically omitting or obscuring all reference to this side of the presentation of doctrine; they neither say the Athanasian Creed, nor teach their children the latter part of the Church Catechism; they may even go so far as to dispute the genuineness of passages in the Bible too strong to be explained away, or even damage a whole book for the sake of discrediting a few texts. Others obscure or minimize that which they cannot conscientiously get rid of. They dare not risk the loss

of disciples, which seems imminent, if they elect to restate the wholesome truth. There must be no danger of losing an influential man like Nicodemus by insisting on the doctrine of new birth. It is not lightly to be contemplated that the rich young ruler should go away, and his position, money, and energy be lost to the Church. Even Naaman has something to say for himself as against a literal compliance with an unmeaning restriction. Quite apart from any hesitation which we might well feel in pronouncing indifferent that which comes to us by the long tradition of the Church, with the most certain warrant of Holy Scripture, does not all experience show that an impatience which resents the difficulty and restrictions imposed upon us in our proclamation of truth defeats its own ends? Either we so impoverish truth that it is not worth having, and those who were attracted by its very severity and awed by its stern commands cease to be impressed by what is declared to be a badly expressed statement of a truism, or only a threat to scare children, and simply add another to the mass of powerless

impressions and tentative possibilities, which go to form what they call their opinions; or else, if we secure their allegiance, it is at the cost of that whole-hearted devotion which has made a sacrifice at the shrine of truth, and has learned truth in the fullest and best way, namely, by doing His will, and so knowing the doctrine, that it is of God. We may fill our churches with a mixed multitude, who never learn because they are never offended, never advance because they are never pressed, never get beyond the stage of civilized heathenism because all dogmatic distinctions have been put on one side as illiberal, and because all revelations of God's wrath have been banished as vulgar. They will last our time; what we say even goes beneath the surface and escapes the birds; but the stones have not been removed, and the thorns are growing as fast as the wheat, and with the first difficulty, or the first new attraction, our flourishing crop of hearers will have withered away. Patience to recognize the importance of dogmatic precision, in the face of slow returns, is of the very last importance, not

only as regards our own faithfulness, but also in view of any permanent success.

(3) We shall find again and again that God's methods take time, and God's methods require patience. Saul, in the face of the Philistines and in view of disaffection among his own people, is for ever forcing himself to sacrifice without waiting for Samuel, and the verdict is ever the same, "Thou hast done foolishly, . . . thy kingdom shall not continue."¹ It does not follow that a thing is right, or that it will produce permanent good, even if it permanently attracts. It does not follow that a man has been too long in a place, because he thinks himself that this is the case. Most probably since he began to think so, he has been absent from the place, that is to say, his interest has gone, and interest has been followed by effort, and for all intents and purposes he has withdrawn from the work, and thinks the consequent failure to be a call to something in the future, whereas it is caused by something in the past.

¹ 1 Sam. xiii. 13, 14.

Impatience with God's methods may be particularly noticed during any period of failure or depression. When the ark is being jolted, there is generally an Uzzah who tries to steady it, with methods which are neither approved nor sanctioned by Almighty God. Are we not at the present moment hearing quite enough about the scarcity of candidates for Holy Orders? We may invent reasons to account for it, some partially true, some quite fantastic, but surely we must not get impatient, even over such a thing as this. The cause probably lies deeper than we suppose, and may even lie at the door of us who claim to be the guides and teachers of this generation. The old man who said that Tenterden steeple was the cause of the Goodwin Sands, was not so far wrong after all, if it be true that the building of the steeple was carried out with money which should have been expended on keeping in repair the barriers erected against the encroachments of the sea. The unwillingness of our youth to consecrate themselves to the service of God, where and in so far as it exists, is only part of a wave of

indifference which is passing over the land. Instead of hastily running after one local symptom of a deep disease with superficial and unworthy remedies, why do we not attack the disease itself? There is no doubt that the actual evil which for some years was strangely absent when it was being most talked about, has now appeared. I mean we are face to face with a love for externals for their own sake, and of an æstheticism which happens to be fashionable. Public opinion has made it impossible to put down what is known as "Ritualism" by short and easy methods, for the simple reason that we live in an age which is beginning to think a great deal of what is pretty, artistic, and bright; but it will be a melancholy thing if Church doctrine is smothered in its own clothes, and the thing symbolized obliterated by the symbol; if, when we seek for devotion, we are met only by incense, or if, when we seek the mark of the Cross, we are greeted only with gorgeous decorations. What position is being assumed by the sterner side of religion? What position is being assigned in popular ecclesiasticism, for

instance, to the fast before Communion, to discipline, to fasting generally? Is almsgiving taking its proper place, or has it been reduced to a perpetual demand, advanced *ad nauseam*, to pay for the extravagance of a service which is neither designed for the glory of God nor contributes to the edification of man? An indifferent and invertebrate youth is the direct product of an undisciplined and untaught generation. Where are our young people to be taught? Do they get teaching at home, where men and women vie with each other in everything which promotes distraction and dissipates quiet thought? Do they get it at school? Are there not many schools where distinctive religious truth (of course there are splendid exceptions) would be regarded as of neither commercial nor moral value; and where the Bible is reduced to the level of an instructive reading-book? Is it to be at college? Here we know something of the destructive criticism wherein, in the desperate desire to be fair, and to let a man know everything that can be said against the old beliefs, the student is driven into perplexity and doubt until he shrinks

from the thought of committing himself to be the mouthpiece of what seems to him a discord of unintelligible sounds. Is it at church? To be quite sincere—What do we teach? God's methods once more are slow, the foundation of Church principles has to be dug deep, and there may be little to show for it in our time. The formation of Christian character in the individual takes a long time, and much of it is distasteful to the natural man; still, it must be done faithfully, so as to outlive our own personal influence, so that the individual, if transplanted into other lands, may have a firm soil of good tradition wrapped round his roots, and good principles and good reasons for the faith which is in him.

Surely we shall put all the strength we can into this individual work, eagerly seize the opportunity of Confirmation to ground our candidates in the Faith, eagerly seize all opportunities of teaching the children, and all the occasions offered by a sick-bed. It may be that we shall have to relay the foundations of Christianity altogether in some parishes, by training up the children where the

parents have utterly fallen away ; but this takes time, and will not give us much to show in statistics, or allow us much opportunity for outside work. Let us resist the demand for novelty, and turn our backs on all the new gospels which are clamouring for adherents, and throw ourselves heart and soul into the glorious gospel of the blessed God. Salvation !—this must be our first, our all-absorbing aim. Never was there more need to preach it than at the present day. Heredity, environment, social difficulties,—they are all met in the gospel ; they can all be solved by a faithful adherence to the precepts of Christ's Church. If we look closely, we shall see that the permanent, unaltering principles of the Church are the abiding defence against the assaults of evil, which do but change their complexion from time to time, but not their nature. And he who follows novelty finds often, and that too late, that he has forsaken the remedies which Christ Himself provided, and which the piety of ages has tested, for that which is fleeting and treacherous, powerless to deal with the deep-seated evils which belong to human nature.

2. If we are impatient with God, we are also apt to be very impatient with our fellow-men. There is the world all around us, which seems so strangely incapable of understanding even, the problems which await us, or the real issues at stake. It is hard sometimes to maintain bare cheerfulness in the face of the most flagrant injustice.

(1) Take, for instance, that most common cry, "Why are you wasting time in controversy on mere trifles, when there are such serious issues at stake?" Men who are devoting their whole lives to the rescue of humanity, who are savagely attacked and threatened with the spoliation of that which is not always valuable in itself, but is yet valued as a means to an end, are accused, if they defend themselves, of disturbing the peace of the Church for trifles. That is to say, the man whose house is violently entered by the robber is accused of disturbing the peace of the neighbourhood, if he mildly defends his property. In no single case have these men been the aggressors, who are now singled out for popular obloquy, as the disturbers

of peace in Israel. This is hard to bear, and it is easy to become querulous and impatient, provocative and controversial. It is easy to look out for some Isle of the Blessed, where there are no divisions, and to follow that mirage across the desert which beckons us to refreshing waters unheated by the fierce blast and able to quench our thirst. It is possible, in these controversial days, to develop a nervous sensitiveness which sees all difficulties quite out of their true proportions. It is possible to wring our hands over "our unhappy divisions," until we believe them to be much worse than they are. It would not be paradoxical to maintain that, as all imperfect forms of truth have yet a certain amount of truth in them, albeit not all that is possible to them, and largely mixed with error, so the very divisions of the Church serve to emphasize certain aspects of the one truth, even if at times they press some one side of it dangerously out of proportion. There is a great truth embodied in the evangelical insistence on subjective piety, and the attitude of the individual towards God, and his need of an appropriating faith.

There is a great necessity that we should insist on the rational basis of all religious truth, and to show that faith is not another name for credulity when it has come over to the ecclesiastical camp; while it will always be necessary to maintain the dogmatic faith of the Church clearly defined and rightly proportioned, which cannot change with the times, nor be dependent on individual opinion. We have seen, only lately, how, in spite of many apparent obstacles, these varying aspects of truth are converging and tending to unite; and it is only impatience which takes the cries of fanaticism or extreme partisanship to represent a deep-seated antagonism, amounting to a complete severance of belief between the contending factions. Patience and gentleness, even under great provocation, will tend more than anything else to the slow development of reunion at home and abroad, which surely has already begun, and in God's own good time will be realized.

(2) How much need there is, again, for patience in our parishes! In a former course of lectures I have already alluded to the trifles for which a

Priest will sometimes sacrifice the good will, and even the good estate, of a parishioner. He will not suffer him to lift up his heart, except it be strictly in the melodies of plain-song, or welcome him at church unless he will recognize the right of the choir to keep themselves together by singing an anthem. He will refuse to recognize all traditions which interfere with his own ideas, or think that it is anything else but a compromise of principle, to wait for a more perfect understanding in those who are not resisting orthodoxy, but who are disturbed by novelty.

(3) But, if I mistake not, there is a closer and more intimate region still, in which we have need to exercise patience one with another, and that is in our relationship with Priests who work in the same district, or in the same parish, or even as members of the same clergy house. If we saw just now that there is a function in Church life, even for our "unhappy divisions," most certainly there is a real place for variety of character and endowment and for differences of temperament in those who are the clergy of any particular parish. And yet it is this

very variety which makes us so impatient. Here is one who seems so unsympathetic, who is for ever, quite unconsciously, treading on our most cherished convictions. We cannot stand the attitude of a S. Paul in dealing with the Gentiles; or a S. Peter seems to us unduly conservative; a S. Philip is so slow to realize the bearing of great truths; while a S. Thomas seems to damp all our ardour. Anybody could have seen what sort of man Judas was—we always disliked him. Why was he associated with us? How difficult are all those questions of loyalty to authority, when they seem to clash with our most cherished methods! How difficult for those in authority to recognize that Boanerges have other outlets for their fiery zeal than the burning down of Samaritan villages! How difficult to sympathize with young enthusiasm, and to give leave to try again where champion after champion has failed! How difficult for Saul not to be jealous of David, or to recognize that a sling and a stone in the hands of an enthusiastic boy might be better than the regulation armour in the hands of a perfunctory veteran! How difficult it is, as we

get older, to become supple and accommodating, not to retire into ourselves, and keep resolutely to our own department! How easy it is to sink into a groove from which we are roused only with difficulty, and at the cost of considerable resentment! We get to dislike the new-comers, and the noise and the bustle; we dislike the new experiments, and we can only praise the old ways, and mourn over modern decadence. Remember, God's work is vast, and has many departments. His Body has many members, and not every member is an eye or an ear, a hand or a foot. There are many members and various members, all necessary to the integrity of the one body. Let us learn to rejoice that the work of the Lord is being done, even when it is not being done by our own instrumentality. Let us learn to set others free, by doing our own subordinate share of work; let us manfully resist all jealousy which manifests itself in impatient dislike of another's prominence. Let us learn to take the second place if it be the place of duty, and the first place if it be the post of danger. Let us learn to love to do the work

which God gives us to do, simply because it is His work. And work for others and with others, without seeking a percentage for our work in praise and self-advancement.

III.

And it is needful to go one step further in thinking of this blemish of impatience. It is only too possible to get impatient with our own condition, with our lot, our position, our health, our means, with the cross laid upon us, but, more especially, with ourselves.

How clearly we see what we ought to be! and how disheartening it is to see what we are! The sermons we preach are our own condemnation. The confessions we make seem to indicate no progress, and this in matters so simple as prayer, control of temper, control of thoughts, self-discipline, and the like. If Despondency told us that we should never succeed, and that perseverance was only to court a hopeless failure, Impatience bids

us for ever to be trying something fresh, or to charge our condition as being in fault, or our surroundings, or our bringing-up, or our heredity, or our spiritual aids, anything, in fact, except ourselves. The author of the "Imitation of Christ" says, "If thou canst not make thyself what thou wouldest, how canst thou expect to have another to thy liking?"¹ There is a danger in these days, when we are allowed to read so much of the inner lives as well as the achievements of great men, lest we should either get altogether out of heart with ourselves, because we fall so far short of the high standard which they set before us; or else of losing the excellence we have while reaching out after that to which we can never attain. So one whom God has bidden to follow Him along the path of weak health will break down because he tries to attain to excellence through a rigid asceticism; or another will learn only to despise his quiet monotony of parochial work, because he has read the devoted labours of some missionary; or another will think himself devoid of all devotion because

¹ "Imit.," I. chap. xvi.

he cannot enter into the ecstasies and heavenly joys which certain great saints have felt in their prayers. Most of all, we get out of heart at our miserable temptations, and impatient with our own shortcomings. No one has ever found the path of holiness an easy one, or won his way otherwise than by constant struggles. Our perfection will consist in getting the good which God expects us to get out of stubborn and difficult surroundings. Take, for instance, our own temperament, our nature, our heredity—whatever we like to call it—different in each of us, thwarting us and perplexing us at every turn; our character has to be perfected in and by this particular temperament. A noble virtue lies close by a damaging defect, and irritation, which might be turned into the disabling sin of anger, becomes, under the power of self-control, a righteous indignation against wrong; or sloth turns into peace; or envy into emulation; and we learn as we study them closer that the virtues which shone in the lives of the saints so conspicuously, were reclaimed from the submerged lands of natural

defects, or won by hard struggles, not developed by a natural aptitude for that particular form of good. If we are conscious to ourselves of any natural tendency to any particular form of sin, do not let us shrink back as one who finds himself disabled for the king's service, but realize that here is an opportunity for developing one especial grace, which the special temptation has opened up to us. It has been said, "The greater the power of any passion, and the more deadly its misuse, the more precious the gift it has to bring."¹ It is a gloomy task to go down day by day into the dark mine of our congenital faults, and resolutely bring up thence the small contributions, as they seem, to a great virtue. But He Who made us willed that by such methods should be developed our perfection, and not a sense of our disability. So again is it with the daily surroundings which seem exactly designed to increase a hundredfold the intensity of our spiritual trouble. They, once more, are the gold-bearing rock out of which the treasure is to be

¹ Dowson, "The House of Wisdom and Love," sect xli.

painfully and laboriously dug. Moses developed the meekness which lay so near his hot passion out of daily intercourse with the stiff-necked people. Judas might have found, like Levi before him, an honourable use for those powers which finally overwhelmed him in covetousness. It may be that God puts us in a special work where we are daily tried by the very nature of the work which is a temptation to us, while it would prove no temptation to another; still if we have not presumptuously chosen it, we may find not only that out of it God is developing the special virtue which we most need, but that also we are discovering fresh aptitudes for helping others, where before we had only shrunk, terror-stricken, within ourselves. So it is with days, those dark days, those days of fierce assault, when we feel that the very persistence of the temptation is an insult, and the very presence of suggestion is a pain, when the air seems darkened with black wings, and forms of evil shut out the very sun, when some dark cloud of trouble presses close upon us, and we are fretted

almost into evil, and goaded into despair of ever seeing the sun unclouded as before. Then when the storm has passed away, God allows us to see the valuable treasure which those dark days have brought to us ; as to Jacob of old, his hurried flight, the lonely Bethel, his years of labour, his disappointments, his cruel treatment by his sons, his days of despair, were all developments in the working out of Israel, which was to supersede and swallow up the old supplanting nature which characterized the shifty Jacob. But perhaps we need to remember, most of all, that many of us have come to God by a self-chosen path, that is, by a path which He permitted us to choose, and not by the easy graduated progress which He had designed for us ; and that in our lives there are many evils still to be atoned for, many errors which still have to be worked out. We forget the inevitable sequence, whereby punishment follows a fault, sometimes even a mistake. And therefore we must not shrink back perplexed at the persistence of temptation which is part of the penalty of past wilfulness, perhaps of past

sins. In the beautiful myth of Proserpine, which comes to us out of the ancient world, her mother Ceres obtains from the king of the gods the promise that she should be released from the lower world whither she had been taken, and restored once more to earth, if only she had not eaten any fruits of that infernal region; but, alas! she had tasted of one pomegranate, and it was only permitted to her to remain six months with her mother on earth during each year, the rest she must spend in the dark under-world whither she had been taken. It may have been a tasting of dark fruit years and years ago; it may have been but a lingering in acquiescence in the captivity of an evil suggestion; it may have been that we forgot our home above, and the bright joys of existence, and all that God meant us to be, and now our punishment is, that part of our time we go heavily under manifold temptations, and expiate by the bitterness of Satan's assaults that which we brought upon ourselves by our own wilfulness.

Impatience will not cure temptation; it will only aggravate it. "Blessed is the man that

endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.”¹ When temptation is upon us, then let us look out for good, which is as near to us as evil; and if the assault be very persistent until we feel the shame of even the possibility of our being susceptible to it, let us remember that the plucked fruit has its far-reaching consequences, and that the punishment of temptation yielded to, and developed into sin, may sometimes be temptation once more, which, while it is no longer sufficiently powerful to effect its dread object, is yet malignant enough to make us feel the weariness of the combat, and impatient with our own miserable shortcomings. “Woe unto you that have lost patience! and what will ye do when the Lord shall visit you?”² God’s hand is heavy upon us; man with his littleness and persecution may trouble us; self may make us despair of ever attaining the crown which we long to wear. But if Patience has her perfect work, we shall be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.³

¹ S. James i. 12.² Eccclus. ii. 14.³ S. James i. 4.

LECTURE V.

SELF-NEGLECT.

“The spirits which are delivered from the burden of the flesh are in deep regions, in a cloistered world, in a still land, where life which has displayed its leaves and branches above, bares its eternal roots.”

WHAT a strange mystery is this self of ours!—this personality which distinguishes us from every one else; this self, which has such a wonderful power of colouring, distorting, or beautifying the message as it passes through us! We cannot escape from it. We have already partially considered it. Let us examine it more fully.

I.

“*Naturam expellas furcâ tamen usque recurret.*”

In places where the personal element is reduced to a *minimum*, and the Priest becomes the official

agent and nothing more, despised in himself, but respected for his office, do not think that the personality does not count. Not only are great opportunities being thrown away, but gradually also there is growing up that deadly severance in people's minds, between a man's religion and a man's life, which, when it is finished, removes the last plank of the bridge which connects poor, weak human nature with the strength of supernatural grace. We, of course, at the present time, are confronted rather with the opposite extreme. There is a tendency among our people to give a great, even an undue consideration to the purely personal element which displays itself beneath the official actions of the Priest. We cannot escape it, and we cannot ignore it; rather we must recognize it and regulate it into right channels, for it is not all evil, and may be turned into a means of much good. And yet how powerful personality is! Here a man finds he has to struggle against his antecedents. People say, who themselves, it may be, are not the best judges, that "he is no gentleman." Certainly we should be foolish to forget that

a great deal of harm is done by that which most often underlies this taunt—a roughness or rudeness, a coarseness of self-assertion, and a want of delicacy and refinement, which make a man presume on the wonderful confidence and the desire for the most cordial relationships which, thank God, characterize as a rule the attitude which the ordinary Englishman wishes to take up as regards his parish Priest.

Here, again, it is a defect in education which betrays itself; the wasted hours at school and college take their revenge, and a man is turned away from accepting the truth of the Faith which he has only imperfectly studied, by obvious incapacity to understand, and palpable ignorance of the elementary facts of history or of science, or even of passing events, which he, the hearer, does understand, and expects at least to be sympathetically treated. The intrusive self asserts itself in simpler, more elementary things than this. The voice will sometimes stultify the message; or the manner in which it is delivered will take away from the solemnity of the utterance itself.

Saddest and most mysterious of all, some inner blemish will make itself felt. The fault which we keep so secret, that it is hardly known to ourselves, appears in the face or manner. "I do not trust that man" is a prejudice which obstinately refuses to be combated, and too often proves itself to be a true instinct. All those blemishes which we have been considering come forth unbidden and hinder the message. Vanity robs it of its persuasiveness; Sloth pulls it down to the earth; Despondency condemns it to unfruitfulness; and Impatience to ruin. It is startling to find how much depends on the man. We know it ourselves; those of us who are in positions of authority know we must reckon with it. We know that there are schemes and methods, excellent in themselves, but which are actually dependent on the man whom we set to carry them out. A system will not make the man, but a man can ruin the very best system. Of course, thank God, there is also the marvellous power for good which is displayed by a good self and a strong personality. Nothing is more remarkable than to see the enormous power of

simple goodness. It is like the glorious hand of God which weaves its wealth of verdure, or colour, or form, over some gap or chasm in nature which has been produced by an upheaval or catastrophe. A land-slip or a grisly rent in the rock is not only covered up, but made an actual thing of beauty under the tender touch of the glowing hand of God. So the rugged voice thrills with sympathy, the uncouth periods vibrate with love, the very ignorance, as the world counts ignorance, is transfigured by the knowledge of those things which God alone reveals to them that love Him. Nothing is more remarkable at the present day than to see the power of sympathy, goodness, and faithful work, those "cords of a man,"¹ which draw people, in spite of themselves, towards the truth which has been commended to them by the honest and good heart, the strong conviction, and the persuasive voice of a human agent. And this power becomes well-nigh irresistible, when it is combined with accurate knowledge, careful study, and patient investigation. When our people are

¹ Hos. xi. 4.

able to feel that they have in us, as they have supremely in Christ, one who is not insensible to temptation, or ignorant of how the world can strike, but one who knows and has felt and can sympathize, not only with those who fall, but with those who have given in. No; we cannot eliminate this self. I cannot see why we should desire to do so. Because, if it is a power for evil, it is also a power for good. No one thinks that we should have gained if we could dissociate the strong personality of S. John from his Gospel, or the ardent individuality of S. Paul from his Epistles, or the historic interest of S. Luke from the "treatises" with which he is identified in the New Testament. Rather we should rejoice that a power which is so misused for evil in the world to attract, seduce, and lead astray, should be capable of being utilized in the direct service of God, in such a way as we have, for instance, displayed to us in the touching Epistle to Philemon, where S. Paul brings all the attractiveness of his personality and the power of his individual claims to bear on the master whom

he wishes to interest in the higher welfare of his runaway servant; and lays the foundation of the Christian emancipation of the slave, as a personal favour done to himself, when he pleads on behalf of a poor malefactor who had become his adopted son in the Faith, and whose interests were bound up in his own.

No; we cannot get rid of self: it will haunt us like a shadow. We cannot contemptuously say, "I am what Nature made me, I can neither alter my birth, my parentage, my education, my voice, my manner, nor materially add to my endowments; partly I have inherited these things, partly they have grown up with me, partly I have made them and cannot now change." This is not true. As a necessary factor of our being, Grace is stronger than Nature, and Grace must be reckoned with in the computation of forces. We must never forget that the "unlearned and ignorant men" overcame the world, and that its wisdom and greatness have been willing to sit at the feet of the fishermen. Education only ceases with our life. Each day we ought to be learning directly and indirectly.

In every other profession no one would be tolerated for a moment who did not keep abreast of the times, and who neither knew nor cared for its discoveries, failures, and tentative efforts. If we wish to turn ourselves into chasubles and surplices, we may be able still to supply the means of grace, but we shall lose touch speedily with those who expect to feel the grasp of a human hand and the sympathy of a living voice; neither can we ever in our apprehension, be far from the times of Hophni and Phinehas, of whom we read that for their sakes "men abhorred the offering of the Lord."¹

There is no doubt that, with the best intentions, clergy are now neglecting themselves, and a very serious danger it is. It takes a little time to sharpen the pencil, but the legibility of the writing or the delicacy of the delineation depends on it. There is no cruising possible while the ship is being overhauled in dock, but its cruising powers are enhanced a hundredfold afterwards, and the danger of disaster is minimized. It

¹ 1 Sam. ii. 17.

takes some few minutes to test the wheels of a train as it stands in the station after a long run, but its safety and speed may depend on the process. It is a false activity, yes, a false self-denial, which takes the form of self-neglect and self-starvation.

Whatever else we do, this ought to be quite clear, that we recognize it as a first charge upon our time that we make ourselves not only hard workers, but able ministers, well stored, well trained, and well equipped. For we cannot give what we have not got, and if our inner life is not fed and supported, if our personality is not developed, we shall drag it along with us only as a dead weight which hinders, instead of the living force which was meant to help us forward and quicken our work and actions with the power of a strong vitality. For our own sakes, for the sake of the cause, we dare not neglect self. We must not forget the first of these considerations. We minister at a dizzy height before God, and at any time we may fall by reason of the great demands which are made upon us. The call to

frequent Communion, the constant use of holy things, and the reiterated repetition of sacred words, carry with them an element of danger. It requires an educated man in his profession to handle some of the scientific machinery of the day; it requires a spiritually educated man to stand so very near to God; and where there is neglect in this particular, we are not far removed from the danger of Nadab and Abihu, of Uzzah or Uzziah, or even of Hophni and Phinehas. The height is very great, and the fall must needs be very severe. And also we must remember the interests of the cause. It is the melancholy history, written again and again in the world's chronicle, that the cause has been lost just when it was being won, by the failure of its champions. People who are not mere "*laudatores temporis acti*," are very persistent in lamenting the decay of that personal sanctity and severity which distinguished so conspicuously the Tractarians. God grant that there may be no cause for the lament. For after all, the personal life and the personal character are the only epistle which some men

read, written in their hearts, known and read of all men, but not always by any means letters commendatory, but rather letters of menace and warning, which pull down rather than edify.

II.

We cannot, I think, deny the great power of individuality. And may we not see a reason for this power, and why God would seem to use it for His own purposes? Man, as we know him since the catastrophe of the Fall, bears only a faint resemblance to the great ideal of a being made in the image and likeness of God. The body, in spite of its pains and aches and temptations, with its creative hand and active foot and ministering senses, was designed to be in the Divine image a mediator between God and the lower creatures. The mind now beaten down into the hard roadway, swept by the fowls, broken up with rock and choked with thorns, was designed to be the rich corn-field of God, rippling

with the soft wind of His inspiration, and reflecting the glory of His face. The spirit, in its calm, unruffled mirror, was designed once to answer face to face to the image of God reflected in it. To this great ideal the saints in all ages have fondly turned. Some day it shall be realized—it was His own promise: “His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face;”¹ they “shall be like Him; for they shall see Him as He is.”² And so man has striven to realize the image and likeness of God—and what do we find? Either consciously or unconsciously there has been the effort to reach up to certain features, as it were, in the general likeness. Different men have tried to realize different parts of the image of God. Some, gazing at His calm contemplation, have tried to realize the beauty of the contemplative life; some, gazing at His ceaseless working, have developed the active life; some, with their eyes on His benevolence, have aimed at the life of philanthropy and mercy. But no man except One, the perfect Man, has been able to realize

¹ Rev. xxii. 3, 4.

² 1 S. John iii. 2.

the perfect image of God. In Him we see the contemplative, the active, the benevolent life perfectly represented—perfect God and perfect man, the King of saints. And this thought surely would help us to realize that there is a distinct function for our individuality. As we stand around the majesty of God, we each reflect a slightly different aspect of His glory. Like as we are to each other, we each have our character or stamp in following out which lies our own perfection and the perfection of our work. Some have the active life put before them, to create for others, and in a human sense to redeem and sanctify. Others again are brought face to face with contemplation and the quiet life, and have to reflect that particular aspect of God. Others are called upon as was S. Paul, to suffer and to bear witness to God by a capacity for endurance. It is thus that we are invited to study our individuality, to develop it, to press it into the service of God ; and therefore to neglect it is more than a mistake, it is to fail in a powerful witness, it is to miss a contribution to the good of the

world, which we were set to give, when God made us what we were, taught us what to be, and called us knowing what we should become.

If self, then, carries with it such power, and may not be neglected, we should most carefully cherish it as an instrument of usefulness in the service of God.

1. And, first of all, we should labour to do everything we can to refine it. A great importance attaches not only to what we do, but to the manner in which we do it. The writer of "John Inglesant," in a preface to an edition of "George Herbert's Poems" has spoken of the refinement which has been a characteristic of the Church of England for so many years. Even in the days of stagnation and utter carelessness, this influence of refinement still remained, in the stately form of prayer, the beautiful English Bible, a reminder even to an age of dead impressions of the God of beauty and of the God of glory. We all know the effect of a church in a poor district, simply of a building, as a witness to the Unseen, and as an elevating power. Something

removed, by however slight a degree, from the dead level of squalor all around it; where not only a message is delivered, but care is taken in the delivery of it; where worship contributes its elevating protest against all that defiles and is unworthy. There ought to be something of the same kind in the life of the Priest. However far we go to meet ignorance, sin, and indifference, we ought never to lose this spiritual refinement. Bishop Stubbs has reminded us that "the clergyman is always a clergyman, as a gentleman is always a gentleman." He goes on to say, "That is a very external way of putting it, but it is the mere translation into prose of the high poetry of the true life of God's servants."¹ Is there any danger of self-neglect in this direction, of trying to reach a heart through slang terms and vulgar expressions, because we have not taken the trouble to translate our meaning into language which does not cease to be simple because it is dignified? Are we in any danger of letting ourselves down while we hope to lift our brother out of the mire,

¹ Bishop Stubbs, "Ordination Addresses," p. 219.

by leaving the vantage-ground of the rock on which we stand? The examples are too frequent of the rescuer being carried away by him whom he would rescue, and of both perishing in a common catastrophe. In trying to escape from a cold and heartless dignity, are we throwing away any power which comes from refinement, which might elevate and cheer poor erring humanity? Our blessed Lord mingled among men in a way which made the taunt not a hopelessly absurd one, that He "came eating and drinking," the "Friend of publicans and sinners."¹ And yet there is no recorded utterance of His that in the least shows that He approached those whom He tried to win and save otherwise than on His own level. There is no contemptuous expression ever recorded of Him, unless it be that He spoke of the wretched Herod as "that fox,"² and the old tradition of Him, whatever may be its worth, is significant: "It cannot be remarked that any one saw Him laugh, but many have seen Him weep."

¹ S. Luke vii. 34.

² S. Luke xiii. 32.

Why are clergy so caricatured at the present day, in books, in pictures, on the stage? And what are they caricatured for? Is it for pettiness and unworthiness and for points in which they have gone too far into the world, which they have imitated, but failed to elevate?

We are thinking certainly about a matter which is not of easy solution. No one wishes to see a revival of the dignified aristocrat, who kept his people aloof, and approached them only on Sunday, from the dignified heights of a discourse written in Sunday language, and only to be apprehended by a special Sunday sense, and then forgotten, as having no bearing on matters of daily life. But one does wish to see a more careful imitation of Jesus of Nazareth, "Who went about doing good,"¹ of Whom it was said, "Never man spake like this Man."² The novelist has told us, with great truth, that "excellence encourages one about life generally; it shows the spiritual wealth of the world . . . and a little private imitation of what is good is a sort of private devotion to it."³ I

¹ Acts x. 38.

² S. John vii. 46.

³ George Elliot.

do plead for the cultivation of refinement in a life like ours, which is busied about the highest things. You will see, in the dinner hour in the City, men and boys coming out of the colour works, all covered with colour, which clings to their person and their clothes—their work follows them. Surely we ought to be saturated with that which we are habitually engaged in, and be unable to part from it. A conscious posing for the purposes of edification is repugnant, a sudden recall under the exigencies of a situation which has gone too far is undignified and suggestive of hypocrisy ; but to be saturated with our spiritual work and to be unconscious that we are so saturated is another thing, and seems to point to the fact that this self-refinement of which we are speaking belongs to the man who habitually lives in the highest society, who is accustomed day by day to pass down the corridors of prayer into the magnificent presence of God, where He sits in glory surrounded by saints and angels, where the melody of worship falls in perpetual cadences from the never-ceasing adoration of the

Church. There he has learned something of the depth of praise which pours itself out in thankfulness for God's exceeding beauty. "We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory." Here is the man who carries about with him something of those Altar memories which transfigure him, so that he can approach with power the demoniac and the sinful and the sad. Here is the man who has accustomed himself to speak to God in the quiet of his meditation, who lives habitually in His presence, and knows "the manner of the God of the land,"¹ as he passes in and out before Him in ejaculatory prayer. Here is the secret of that inner refinement, which nothing can take away or destroy, which enables a man to "pass like a sunbeam through pollution, himself unpolluted," and to lift up others into the high vantage-ground of a life and conversation which is vigorous with the health of one who sees God, and is full of the wholesome strength which comes from His right hand.

2. And not only must we seek to refine self, we

¹ 2 Kings xvii. 26.

must also be very careful to see that we do not neglect to educate it. There are many complaints now that we clergy are ceasing to be an educated body. Certainly we should do nothing to encourage this estimate, or allow ourselves to think that to do many things is any excuse for doing them badly. It has become, however, rather a commonplace in addresses to clergy to urge the paramount importance of reading, and at such periods as a Retreat or in Lent it is only too easy to accept this as a counsel of perfection, and to read, perhaps, S. Thomas Aquinas for a week, and then to go back to our old habits, whatever they may be. Surely in all these matters it is far wiser to look at what is practicable in our own lives, than spasmodically to reach out after something which we know we shall not keep up, and only dishearten ourselves by another failure. In the first place, of course, it is not true that clergy generally neglect to educate themselves by study. One glance at any publisher's theological list will show what is being done for this highest form of learning, and by the clergy.

Still, we feel that in the list of things to be thrown over to lighten the ship in the storm of pressure, reading comes surprisingly early, and that partially because some of us do not really care for it, and some of us find that we can get on without it, and some feel the lack of any stimulus to urge them to it. Would it not be something if we tried to get rid of some of the hindrances to study? The question of time, for instance, does not depend so much on pressure of business which creates the lack of leisure, as on want of method which prevents us from using the leisure which we have. The want of interest in reading, again, would largely disappear if we made our reading centre round our sermons, and made it a matter of obligation to give to our people something which we had really endeavoured to master and illustrate by definite reading on and around the subject of which we were treating. It would be reasonable to expect that we should then find collateral studies suggesting themselves, questions would appear demanding solution, and the preparation of our sermons would at least give

us that stimulus such as we found in old days in subjects set for an examination, which, whether we liked it or not, we were obliged to master. The simplest sermon becomes the simpler and more forcible, if it is simple, not from having nothing in it, but simple in the sense of containing great truths simplified, truths capable of being translated into the plainest language by us, because we have thoroughly mastered their meaning and so are able to explain their contents. And in making time and arousing interest in study, something can be done in rescuing moments which are now wasted, and repressing lower interests in favour of the higher. The newspaper and the novel are both good in their proper place, but neither of them in business hours, or when greater interests are pressing. At least let us rescue study from the dreary category of "things which we know we ought to do," and put it on the level of things practicable and urgent. Remembering at the same time that an educated self requires all the refinements which can be gained by poetry, history, languages, and the study of contemporary

questions, and that we are not adorning the doctrine of God in all things if we habitually neglect what is known as culture, and are unacquainted with even the alphabet of the language which is being spoken in more educated society.

3. But it is education in its highest form of development that we especially owe to ourselves. We have to show to our people that there is no part of our composite being which is not brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and enriched for His absolute service. We have to exhibit to the world the spectacle of a body magnificently controlled and utilized for the service of God, not only kept under and brought into subjection, but also made a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.¹ How careful, therefore, we ought to be not to manifest in any way a want of self-control! How earnestly we ought to insist on the proper observance of the Church's days of fasting and abstinence for ourselves, if for no other reason, at least for this, as showing that we have absolute power over our appetites, and

¹ Rom. xii. 1.

can eat or not eat, take up or let alone with perfect ease, as a result of the discipline which we have imposed on ourselves! How anxiously we ought to watch the encroachment of any habit, or the indulgence of any luxury, or the enjoyment of any comfort, lest we should have to say of this or that, "I cannot do without it"! How eagerly we ought to develop in ourselves the power of "enduring hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ"!¹ Indolence, self-indulgence, love of ease, all become serious defects in a Priest, if they signify that he has not developed the proper service which that body ought to render which is under the absolute control of the will, as ordered by reason and enlightened by the Spirit. And as with the body, so with the soul, the rational soul. This, again, needs to be developed so that its ambitions and desires coincide with the will of God—"to love the thing which God commands, and desire that which He promises;" while we must never forget that the spirit also needs constant development and education; that to spend much

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

time in prayer and meditation will demand a special aptitude and a special training. Here may I say a word for that devotion known as a Retreat, or even for a Quiet Day, as helping a man to develop in himself spiritual power, so that he may learn to breathe the air of Heaven for longer intervals, to witness the mystery of the Transfiguration of the Sacrament or the mystery of the Agony of atoning Love, without heaviness and sleep, or only an indistinct apprehension that it is good for him to be there? We shall still find it needful to insist that young men have to learn at our Theological Colleges how to pray, as well as the principal heresies of the early Church or the facts of English Church history. We shall still have to insist that a great deal of hard and necessary work has to be done in church, which cannot be put down to the credit of what the world knows as activity, or parochial organization. We dare not neglect ourselves in any of these ways. There will be a constant temptation to us to substitute speed for thoroughness, and to do spiritual work with untrained hands and with

unspiritual methods. Nothing shows the skilled workman more than this—that he spends a good deal of time in choosing and preparing his instruments and his materials, and never thinks time to be wasted if it is spent in preparation and in the securing that good work shall be done in the best way, with the best instruments and the utmost care, and has learnt what is meant by the old saying, *Festina lente*.

III.

One word in conclusion. The aim of all we have been considering to-day is surely to be summed up in this—that we must learn to be ourselves, and learn to be a power. “We are born originals, and die copies,” is a proverb whose truth is apparent nowhere else in such intensity as in our profession. Every one must have noticed the extraordinary waves of fashion which set in as to the methods of conducting Divine service, as to ritual, methods of bringing people to church,

singing in church, the division and length of the services. There seems sometimes even to be a rivalry in setting the fashion, to start something which is new, something which no one has ever before attempted; and we know how congregations are made to mourn or dance according to the last behest of the ecclesiastical piper who follows the dictates of the latest unofficial regulation at the hands of fashion. But this extends to many things and to things more subtle than the outward life. It is an argument, for instance, from which there is no appeal, as regards the vexed question of holiday attire for the Priest (not that this is an important matter *per se*, but only as some of us think *per accidens*) that some Continental Priests have sometimes been seen in England dressed as laymen. There is something more than dislike or inaptitude for teaching in the schools, which is behind so much of the modern neglect in this particular. It is whispered in some quarters that it is unclerical, that it is work for a schoolmaster, and not for a Priest. There is a danger of this spreading deeper still. There is the mysticism

of an unintelligible performance of Divine service which is caught up with wonderful rapidity, if it is supposed to denote something which we are not and were never meant to be, which the more elevated intelligences have discovered that we are and certainly must endeavour to become. There is a fear lest even our moral defects should become fashionable. "They manage these things," we are told, "much more easily abroad. Ash Wednesday and Lent are treated much more sensibly there than with us. It is only a relic of Tractarian private judgment, which causes people to make such a fuss about so simple a matter! It is a question of rule and regulation and submission to Holy Church; and a dispensed Lent, and transferred vigils, and the aid of a properly varied system of *maigre* food, may easily reduce our fasting to a better system."

It is all-important that we should remember that our perfection lies in the direction of developing what we are, and that God, Who made no leaf like its fellow on the same tree, wishes that man should cultivate unity in variety. The

world's hymn which mounts up to God is a harmony, not a unison. Let us remember this when we are sometimes startled at the amazing disproportion between our powers and the powers of those who have preceded us in the post which we occupy. God has called me there, knowing what I am, and has asked me to be my true self. I shall not please Him by borrowing another's voice, or by twisting myself violently into another's methods. God wants me as my self. "Many good works have I shewed you from My Father."¹ There lies our work, as our nature has come to us from the Father, fashioned and illuminated by grace, and we deprive the world of a separate and distinct good if we fashion ourselves to order in conformity to a type which happens to rule at the moment, in faith and morals, as well as in ecclesiastical administration.

S. John x. 32.

IV.

Surely if we have learned anything of the disabling power of the blemishes which so easily develop themselves in the priestly life, we shall feel how incumbent it is upon us more and more to labour to be a power in the world, a power in the place where we live, and a power in doing something to nullify the malignity of Satan as an agent of evil in the world. This seems to sum up the crying needs of the time for ourselves as clergy. We want to make ourselves more of a power. It was once said, *Clerus Anglicanus stupor mundi*. There is no reason why it should not be said again. But the astonishment of the world is a thing which we can neither command nor labour for ; it will be given as an appreciation of excellent work, it will equally be withheld from that which is poor and blemished. The world for us, after all, lies within very manageable limits around our own door. We can gauge our possession of power by such a simple thing as the

management of a class at school, or of an unruly choir, or in the general exercise of discipline in a parish. The ordinary estimate of the Priest ranks him as a moral policeman: it is expected of us that we should be able thus to exhibit power, and if we are deficient in this, it will seriously impair the professional estimate which ought to attach to us in a world which makes its appreciations on premisses utterly unfair, but from conclusions, nevertheless, which are wonderfully true.

It is expected of us, again, that we should have some considerable power of persuasion. Of what possible good are we, if we have not? The persuasive power of evil is manifest on all sides. Error has its active missionaries and its powerful preachers. Sin wins its way by attractiveness, and one ordinary evil temptation countervails a whole course of sermons. Why is it? Why are we not more persuasive? Why is this element of power so often lacking? Have we nothing to learn from the desperate earnestness of evil, and the pertinacity of its assaults? There is no gentle balancing there of equal possibilities, which are

advanced with an unruffled mind, which seems to have bid farewell to any sense of importance in decision, or value in choice. Evil is pressed on the soul with desperate earnestness, and error is driven home with remorseless logic. If we wish to have the power which comes of persuasion, we must care for our own people more, care for truth more, care for our principles more ; and show that we at all events are fighting for no light and trivial matter, but for life itself, and the things that make up life. Power, after all, is a quality difficult to define, if it be easy to recognize. The strong man is not made by circumstances nor by mental or physical endowment. Strength of the highest order is made perfect by God's grace in weakness. And those whom the world has buried in its pits, or left at home at the sheepfolds, often turn out to be the Josephs who preserve life, and the Davids who slay the giants, because as workers together with God they have not received the grace of God in vain, and out of weakness have been made strong.

To know our blemishes should certainly be the

first step to remedy them. The ideals which are put before us in our great calling are wonderful and excellent. Let us set to work to lay aside every weight, and those sins which do so easily beset our profession, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.¹

¹ Heb. xii. 1.

THE END.

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